LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

PARSHAS BEREISHIS

BY

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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS BEREISHIS

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Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

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B"H

INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Bereishis* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

> "The time of your Redemption has arrived."

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning

about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

The parsha Bereishis is obviously a fundamental parsha because it marks the beginning of existence.

But it also alludes to the purpose of existence, which is: to make this world a dwelling place for G-d through the efforts of the Jewish people and their observance of the Mitzvos of the Torah.

When we realize that G-d given goal we will have entered into the Messianic Age.

ESSAY ONE

THE END IN THE BEGINNING

A most basic human instinct is the hope for a better world.

This hope was implanted in us from the very beginning of creation.

It is the underlying meaning of the first Torah verse: "In the beginning."

The goal of creation was to actualize the plan that was embedded in the world from the moment of creation.

ESSAY ONE

THE END IN THE BEGINNING

The Most Fundamental Principle

There is a principle in Kabbalah (*Sefer Yetzirah*) that "the end is wedged in the beginning and the beginning in the end." This conveys the idea that we can find a thematic connection between the beginning of a process or a text and its end.

And so as we approach the very beginning of the Torah, which deals with the genesis of existence, it stands to reason that the "end" of history will be represented in its beginning.

What is the end of history?

It is axiomatic in the teachings of our Sages and our Chassidic masters, that the "end", or is the objective of creation; a perfect world. It is a world that, in the words of the Midrash (*Tanchuma* 16), becomes a "dwelling place for G-d." This is what Judaism defines as the Messianic Age (*Tanya* Chapter 36).

Based on the concept that the "end" is present in the beginning and the beginning is present in the end, the belief in Moshiach and the Messianic Age can be understood as more than just a belief in an utopian age. For even more than the Jewish liberation from exile and the establishment of true peace for all of humankind, it will be the culmination of all that G-d had in mind in the beginning, when He Created the world.

Cumulative Belief

The belief that this Age will occur, and that it will be ushered in by a great Jewish leader who is called Moshiach, is one of the thirteen principles of faith upon which all of Judaism is founded (Maimonides, Commentary on Mishnah, Sanhedrin, Chapter 11).

But the belief in Moshiach is actually more than just one of the thirteen principles.

Indeed, the belief in Moshiach is a belief that incorporates most, if not all, of the preceding eleven principles of faith. For, in the words of the prophet Isaiah (11:9) the Messianic Age will bring about the promise: "the world will be full of the knowledge of G-d as the waters

cover the sea." Knowledge of G-d implies the knowledge that He is the one and only, incorporeal and omniscient G-d. In the days of Moshiach, it will also become apparent to all that it is G-d who has communicated the Torah to us and that our commitment to His Torah throughout the ages has transformed the world into a dwelling place for G-d. All will understand that the transformation of the world was the ultimate purpose for which the world was created.

In other words, belief in Moshiach really entails the belief in **all** of the principles of faith, which can be broken down into the belief in a perfect, infinite G-d, who has communicated to us the way we should live so that we, though our efforts, will realize a world of perfection, where G-d's existence will become a manifest reality.

So fundamental is the belief in Moshiach that the *Chofetz Chaim*, a non-Chassidic sage of the past generation, declared that it is "*Ikar Haikarim*, the **most** fundamental of the fundamental principles of faith because... then the entire world will recognize G-d's sovereignty...." (*Chofetz Chaim* on Torah, Parshas Noach).

This statement must be understood to incorporate some, if not all, of the other principles into the belief in Moshiach. Certainly, the Chofetz Chaim was not suggesting that the belief in a Messianic Age is more fundamental to Judaism than the belief in G-d. In fact, the belief in the Messianic Age includes the belief in G-d and all the other fundamentals of Judaism. They all come to life with the coming of Moshiach.

Moshiach in *Bereishis*

The twin beliefs in Moshiach and the Messianic Age can be found in numerous verses throughout Biblical literature, as one would expect. Consistent with the expectation of a thematic connection between the end and the beginning (*Sefer Yetzirah)*, it seems reasonable that the Torah would have alluded to the concept of Moshiach in the very beginning of the Torah as well. Indeed, the Midrash on the words, "And the spirit of G-d hovered over the waters," states that this is a reference to "the spirit of Moshiach." (*Bereishis Rabbah* 2:4) By the same reasoning, it can be assumed that Moshiach

would also be hinted at in the very first word of the Torah—*Bereishs.*

In the dimension of hints and gematria (Torah numerology, where words are analyzed based on their numerical value) we find a fascinating fact: The word *Bereishis* numerically is 913. The phrase: "Moshiach the son of David, Elijah the prophet; they will come speedily to redeem us" also adds up to 913!

As intriguing and fascinating as this hint may be, there must be a more conceptual connection of *Bereishis* to Moshiach. This we will discover by better understanding the significance of the first word of Torah.

Bereishis! The very first word of the Torah! More than any other word, it encapsulates all of the Torah. The Rebbe has stated on numerous occasions that the name of a book is its very soul.

Moreover, the very first word of the Torah is its head. As a head controls and actually comprises the life force of the entire body, similarly, the word *Bereishis*, the head of the Torah, represents and defines the life-force of the entire Torah.

Indeed, the word *Bereishis* contains within it the word *rosh*, which means head. It is safe to assume that this word encapsulates all of the body of Torah.

The Purpose of Creation and Finding Meaning in Life

Of all the multitudes of meanings our sages have revealed on this word, the foundational teaching is the one given by Rashi, the principle Bible commentator. He writes that *Bereishis* actually means: "the world was created for the sake of Torah and for the sake of Israel."

In the simplest of terms this means that the universe was created for both the Torah and Israel. It is also obvious that the creation of the universe was not intended for Torah and Israel as two separate entities, but for their synthesis, i.e., as Israel implements the will of G-d (i.e. Torah) within the framework of the world.

What Rashi says encapsulates the extensive and profound analysis that Chassidic thought offers concerning creation. G-d created the universe, because "He desired a dwelling

place in the lowliest levels of existence," our sages declare. Chassidic thought explains that when a Jew performs a Mitzvah it introduces the Divine within the mundane. Ultimately, at the time of Redemption, the effects of this ongoing process will be felt and the world will become a G-dly world.

The Messianic Age should, therefore, be understood not merely as a reward for our actions, but, as the culmination and objective of a process that began at creation. Furthermore, we should appreciate the need for Moshiach and the Redemption not only because their arrival will constitute the world reaching a state of perfection, but, more importantly, reaching that point is the very raison d'être for our existence and indeed, all of existence.

There is no feeling more exciting than knowing that we are legitimate. And, conversely, there is nothing more unsettling than to believe that we have no purpose. Even the so-called "secularists" in our society are now clamoring to find and introduce meaning into their lives. People are dissatisfied with just living for the sake of living.

Even the hedonists of our age often feel compelled to devote some of their energies to finding legitimacy for themselves by doing positive things. This positive phenomenon is obviously one of the effects of living "on the threshold of the Redemption."

It is no wonder then that the first time we read *Bereishis* is on what is arguably the happiest day on the Jewish calendar: Simchas Torah! What greater joy can there be than knowing that we have a purpose; we are legitimate and we have proven ourselves by virtue of having completed the entire cycle of the Torah.

Finding *Ultimate* Meaning in Life

Obviously, not everyone's attempt at finding meaning in their lives is successful. To be successful, we have to remember that our lives have meaning only to the extent that they conform to the purpose for which they were created. The world was created for the realization of its purpose of providing a "dwelling place" for G-d, which will occur with the coming of Moshiach.

Of all of G-d's creation, only the human being is capable of knowing that there is a purpose and is capable of pursuing it.

Of all the peoples of the world, the Jewish people were entrusted with the Torah, which not only informs us that there is a purpose and that we should pursue it, but even how it could be achieved. The Jewish nation was chosen to be a light unto the nations. This does not simply mean that we should be good role models but, moreover, we should also inform the world of its purpose and how each and every individual has a role in making this purpose come to fruition; Jews by observing their 613 commandments and non-Jews by observing their seven "Noahide commandments."

Of all the Jews in the world, the *Tzadikkim*, the righteous and the spiritual leaders, are referred to as "the eyes of the community," because they can see clearly where to go and to how best reach our destination. They can be compared to a person standing on the top of a mountain who can see the whole picture, as opposed to someone on the ground, whose vision is limited. And, of course, they themselves are the ideal role models, whose

every action exemplifies the realization of the purposefulness of life.

The Unique Human Being

Of all Jewish leaders, it is Moshiach who, more than anyone before him, realizes his G-d given potential. Moshiach, because he is our leader at the end of exile, is endowed with a more acute sense of knowing where we are and how close we are to the realization of our goal.

Possessing the cumulative spirituality of millennia of Jewish leadership, Moshiach sees the world in a way no one before him has. And only when Moshiach will usher in the era of Geulah for the entire world will the world's existence be totally validated.

In effect, all of our lives have meaning only in the context of the coming of Moshiach and his ushering in of the Messianic Era of *Geulah*-Redemption. In the words of the Talmud: "The world was created only for Moshiach." (Sanhedrin 98b).

This does not contradict Rashi's statement that the world was created for Torah and Israel, but complements it. Moshiach is the

one who embodies the holiest and best of Israel. And the Messianic Age is when the Jewish people, through Moshiach's inspiration, make the entire world receptive to the Torah's plan and design for the universe.

The *"Bereishis"* of Torah is thus the awareness that the world was created for a purpose. And this purpose is to implement G-d's Master Plan for the world through our observance of Torah and Mitzvot and by serving as a light unto the nations [as well].

World events, statements from the greatest Jewish leaders of this century and particularly the declaration of the Lubavitcher Rebbe that "*Higia Zman Geulaschem*-The Time of Your Redemption has Arrived," make it clear that this purpose is about to unfold.

Why is it Important to Believe in a Human Moshiach?

In another commentary of our sages (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1:4) the word "*Bereishi*-In the beginning" is interpreted as a reference to Moshiach, whose name preceded the very

creation of the world. Moshiach is thus *Bereishis*, the very beginning of creation.

There is another very important insight to be gleaned from the Torah's allusion in the beginning not only to the Messianic Age, but also to Moshiach himself.

It seems that our sages wish to convey that not only is it important for us to know that the world was created for the Messianic Age, it is also important for us to know Moshiach's name and understand his characteristics as well.

What, we may ask, is so crucial about the name of Moshiach? Isn't Moshiach just G-d's instrument?

The answer lies in the realization that Moshiach embodies the characteristics of Redemption even **before** it has fully unfolded. To be sure, Moshiach is a human being. But, he is one who breaks through the barriers of *galus*-exile because he has a special soul; a soul that has not been affected by *galus* conditions.

Yinon: The Name of Moshiach

According to the foregoing Midrash, the name of Moshiach that precedes creation[, according to the Midrash] is *Yinon*, which alludes to Moshiach's capacity to awaken even those who are dead.

This has dual meaning. First, it is taken literally by our Sages. In the Messianic Age, Moshiach will be the medium through which the dead will be brought back to life. The belief in the Resurrection of the Dead is actually the thirteenth principle of faith that follows immediately the twelfth principle of belief in Moshiach.

But even before that time, Moshiach figuratively awakens the dead. Exile conditions desensitize us to everything G-dly and spiritual. Moshiach is the Jewish leader who sees through the concealment of exile and arouses us from our sleep. Moshiach challenges us and doesn't let us fall back into exile slumber.

Judaism's belief in a Moshiach who will usher in a Messianic Age is crucial to the process itself. In order for us to go out of our internal and external exile, we must associate ourselves with and follow Moshiach. It is his

inspiration and spiritual energy that empower us to transcend the constraints of exile.

The Talmud (see Sanhedrin 98b) suggests that in every generation there is one *tzadik* who is worthy of being Moshiach. Identifying with Moshiach is a useful exercise if it leads us to look to that person as our role model and following his example. Looking for Moshiach is another way of looking for a way to live where our existence will be legitimized and validated.

When we focus on Moshiach, it helps us to elicit the spark of Moshiach within (*Me'or Einayim*), making us an active part of the process of Redemption. This is what makes *Bereishis*, the original plan for the world, become a reality.

ESSAY TWO

IT'S ALL IN THE HEAD

The head/brain contains all of the energy of the entire body.

The "head" or first word of the Torah, Bereishis, contains within it all of the Torah and its objective to lead us to the Messianic Age.

ESSAY TWO

IT'S ALL IN THE HEAD

The First Word

Much has been said about the first word of the Torah: *Bereishis*, which is usually translated as "In the beginning." Hundreds, if not thousands, of commentaries have been attached to this word, arguably, much more than that which has been said and written about any other word in the Torah? Indeed, there are even hundreds of explanations why the first letter of the Torah is the letter *beis.*

Why has so much been said about the first word?

The answer lies in a premise that the first word of the Torah is not just the first word; it is also the head of the entire Torah. Just as the head contains within it the energy for the rest of the body, so too, the first word of the Torah encapsulates all of the Torah.

The above is even more pronounced considering that the first word of the Torah contains the word *rosh*-head in it. Thus, this

word can be viewed as the fountain-head of all that which follows in the Torah.

One may take this point a step further. If the word *Bereishis* contains within it all of the Torah, even what might appear to ne minutia, it certainly alludes to the most overtly fundamental aspects of Torah.

Based on this premise, we may further suggest that the word *Bereshis* contains within it an allusion to the very purpose of creation, particularly because *Bereishis* is about creation. It therefore stands to reason that at the beginning of creation, as it is recorded in the Torah, we will discover hints to the Messianic Age, the ultimate goal of creation, as the Talmud states: "The world was created exclusively for Moshiach."

Where in the word *Bereishis* is there an allusion to the Messianic Age?

The *Beis Hamikdash*: The First Step of the Final Redemption

The very first letter of the word *Bereishis* is the letter *beis.* This letter is the initial of the word *Beis Hamikdash*-The Holy Temple.

According to Maimonides, Moshiach's arrival is divided into two stages. The first stage establishes his credentials as a leader, who is descended from King David, steeped in Torah, inspires Jews to walk in the path of Torah and its commandments, repairs the breaches in its observance and wages war with evil. Anyone who has all these qualifications is presumed to be Moshiach.

When this presumed Moshiach defeats all the enemies that surround Israel, builds the *Beis Hamikdash* and gathers all Jews to the Land of Israel, then he is confirmed as Moshiach.

In other words, all of Moshiach's activities before building the *Beis Hamikdash* are to establish his "resume" as a worthy leader who, in the tradition of all great leaders before him, such as Moses and King David, has the potential to usher in the Final Redemption, when G-d's presence will be fully revealed and all the positive changes that were predicted will follow as a matter of course.

The first stage in the unfolding of the Messianic process is the building of the *Beis Hamikdash*, G-d's chosen location that channels His overt presence into the world.

Thus, the very first letter of the Torah is the letter *Beis,* to mark the very first step of the Final Redemption, at which time the world will realize the purpose for which it was created.

The Final Stage

The final stage in the Messianic process is the Resurrection of the Dead. This phenomenon, where the souls of the deceased will return to a reconstituted body, has been foretold by many of the prophets and is regarded by Maimonides as the 13th and final principle of faith.

The Resurrection of the Dead is not just a miraculous revival of the dead, but it represents the climax of the entire process of creation. If the Messianic Age is the climax of all of creation, the Resurrection of the Dead is the climax of the Messianic Age.

At that time, we will be exposed to G-d's very essence, a revelation so sublime that, as the Talmud states, we cannot presently even fathom its loftiness. G-d's presence will pervade all of existence in ways that are unimaginable today. First and foremost is

that the dichotomy between the soul and the body, the physical and the spiritual will no longer endure.

The Hebrew term for the Resurrection is *Techiyas Hameisim*, the initial of which is the letter *tav;* the final letter of the word *Bereishis*.

In effect, the first letter of *Bereishis* alludes to the first step in the Final Redemption, the building of the *Beis Hamikdash* and the last letter of the word *Bereishis* alludes to the climax and ultimate objective of the Messianic Age, the Resurrection of the Dead.

This leaves us with four middle letters of the word Bereishis: *reish, aleph, shin* and *yud*. What do these letters stand for?

The *Reish*: The Humble Moshiach

The letter *reish* can be said to allude to Moshiach himself. In the Biblical prophecy of Zecharyah, Moshiach is referred to as a "poor man (*ani*) riding on a donkey." The letter *reish* is a synonym for poor. This alludes to Moshiach's humility, a trait he inherits from Moses the first redeemer, which qualifies him to be the final redeemer. The Talmud

explicitly refers to Moshiach's distinction as a humble person.

Indeed, the Midrash cites Moshiach's announcement to the world that "the time of your Redemption has arrived" with the preface, "Humble ones."

In other words, humility is not just a qualification for Moshiach; it is also a qualification for us to be receptive to his message and to be worthy of Redemption.

The letter *reish* is also the initial of the word *Rabeinu*, our teacher. Moshiach's qualification is based on his fidelity to the teachings of *Moshe Rabeinu*. Moshiach personifies all the qualities of Moses and then some. Moshiach takes all the ideals of Moses and implements them, fully.

Moreover, Moshiach will become the world's greatest teacher, whose students will include all of the greatest of the past including the Patriarchs and even Moses! Moshiach is the ultimate *Rabeinu* because he embodies everything of Moshe *Rabeinu* and more in his capacity as the preeminent teacher of the Jewish people and of all humanity.

The *Aleph*: Master, Teacher and Wonder of the World

The next letter, *aleph*, stands for *Alufo shel Olam*-Master of the World. The Rebbe would frequently refer to the Alter Rebbe's teaching that the sole difference between *Golah*-exile and *Geulah*, is the letter *aleph*. The underlying message here is that Redemption will not negate exile and erase all of our accomplishments during this pre-Redemption period; it will retain all of the positive features of exile with the "mere" introduction of the "*aleph*."

This *aleph*, the Rebbe says, actually has three dimensions:

a) Recognition of G-d as the Master (*Alufo)* of the entire Universe.

b) The word *alpeh* also has the connotation of wisdom and knowledge. The entire world will be inundated with Divine knowledge.

c) The letters of the word *aleph*, rearranged, forms the word *peleh*, which means "wonder." The world will be exposed to the most wondrous and transcendent Divine energies, all of which will be comfortably contained within the parameters of the world.

The *aleph,* can also allude to Elijah the prophet, whose name in Hebrew begins with the letter *aleph*.

Elijah will be Moshiach's accomplice in many areas. First he will pave the way by bringing the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers. His focus will be in bringing peace to the world. Elijah also have a role in announcing the arrival of Moshiach, resolving unanswered question of Jewish law and assisting Moshiach in the Resurrection of the Dead, among other roles he will fill.

The *Shin:* Shalom and Shabbos

This leads us to the next letter *shin*, which is the initial of the word Shalom-peace. One of Moshiach's pronouncements is the word "shalom" because the Messianic Age will bring the ultimate peace between G-d and the world, which will, in turn, remove all the barriers that exist between people. Not only will there be true unity within the Jewish community; all of the nations will join the Jewish people in serving one G-d, although they will not have to convert to Judaism.

The *shin* can also refer to the Shabbos because the entire Messianic Age is compared to the tranquility and serenity that the Shabbos introduces. Whereas in the present we have a taste of the future Shabbos one day a week, in the Era of Redemption it will be a perpetual Shabbos; perpetual delight and bliss.

The *Yud:* Yechidah and Ultimate Oneness

This leads us to the penultimate letter *yud.* This letter, besides being the first letter of G-d's name, is also the initial of the word *Yechidah,* which is one of the five names our souls has. However, of all these five names it represents the highest, most essential level of the soul. In Chassidic source it is often identified as the very essence of the soul. It is the soul's purest expression of its connection with G-d's essence; *Yechidah* is the essence of the soul as it connects to the essence of G-d.

This level of the soul, which can only be expressed, intermittently, in the present day and age will become the staple in the Messianic Age.

Moreover, Moshiach's soul is referred to as the general *Yechidah* soul. This means that he possesses the ultimate expression of *Yechidah* which represents the ultimate in oneness with G-d and who ignites the *Yechidah* spark within all of us.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the word *Bereishis* stands for six features of the Messianic Age:

Beis: *Beis Hamikdash*-The first stage in the Final Redemption. This aspect was hinted first because, as Maimonides states the building of the Bais Hamikdash is one of the tests to verify Moshiach's identity.

Reish: Moshiach, the epitome of humility and the ultimate teacher. Moshiach will be fully revealed after the construction of the Bais Hamikdash and the ingathering of the exiles. After that process is concluded he will then turn towards the ultimate goal of the Messianic Age to reveal G-d's oneness to the entire world. This is alluded to in the next letter.

Aleph: The introduction of the Divine Master, Teacher and Wonder of the world into the

parameters and framework of our exile lives. When the world wil experience Divine revelation it will lead to Shalom, peace, indicated by the next letter.

Shin: Shalom-universal peace and the eternal Shabbos. This will be followed by the complete revelation of the essence of our soul represented by the next letter.

Yud: The revelation of the *Yechidah*-essence of our souls which is not subject to death. When our *Yechidah* is actualized we will enjoy eternal life together with all those who will be brought back to life; hinted in the next letter.

Tav: The Resurrection of the Dead.

ESSAY THREE

THE FIRST WORD

The very first letter of the Torah translates as "because."
The most powerful word, arguably, is "because."
Because it says that there is a cause and that Creation is purposeful and that we are not accidents of birth.

ESSAY THREE

THE FIRST WORD

Grammatically Incorrect

Bereishis, the first word of the Torah, is also the name of the first Parsha-weekly Torah portion of the first book of the Five Books of Moses. The standard translation for this word, "In the beginning," raises a question.

It is reasonable to assume that the Torah would have chosen as its first word one that would convey a spiritual and enduring message. What is so significant and inspirational about the statement, "**In the beginning** (**Bereishis**) G-d created the heaven and the earth?"

More specifically: Of what import is the knowledge that the first things G-d created were the heaven and the earth? What spiritual and uplifting message is conveyed by the knowledge of the chronology of creation?

Rashi, the greatest and most important of all Biblical commentators, suggests an entirely different translation of *Bereishis*. It does not mean "**In** the beginning G-d created the

heaven and the earth," Rashi asserts, but "**Because** of the 'beginning' G-d created the heaven and the earth." Rashi further clarifies the meaning of "beginning" as a reference to Torah and Israel (the Jewish people), which are referred to in Biblical literature as beginnings.

This rather novel translation/interpretation sheds light on the significance of the word "*Bereishis,*" and the Torah's decision to commence with this word. According to Rashi, the first letter and syllable of the Torah, the letter *beis,* means "because," and not "in" as it is generally translated.

The Torah is arguably the only book ever written that begins with the word "because!" By beginning the Torah in such an unusual way (Thank G-d, Moses did not ask an English teacher to do the editing of the Torah.) the Torah thereby conveys a two-fold message.

Purpose, Truth and Happiness

First, everything in creation has a purpose. The world was created "**because** of...," implying that ours is not a haphazard

universe. It is not an arbitrary creation, or a product of random mutations. There is a purpose in and a meaning to life. Without this realization, existence has no meaning. And, obviously, absent the notion of meaningful existence, there is no rational basis for Judaism.

We can now appreciate why the Torah begins with this word. It teaches us that the very first thing we must know is that there is meaning to everything.

Not only is it important for us to have this realization because it is true, but without the sense that the world has a cause and a purpose, life becomes meaningless and depressing. And to rid ourselves of depression, we self-indulge to the point where we are prone to do things that are self-destructive in the end.

Believing that the world has a purpose is both true and good for us spiritually and physically.

Psychologists have grappled with determining what the most fundamental motivating force is in the human psyche. Viktor Frankel, a noted psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, concluded from his experience in the death

camps that what makes us tick is the need to find meaning in life. In his opinion, that quest for meaning was the only thing the tormented souls in the death camps had left. And it was this desire to find meaning that enabled many to survive the horrors of the Holocaust.

The Torah makes that case at the very outset. The word "because," and the concept it contains, is at the beginning of the Torah, as well as at the core of our being.

Perhaps the dual benefit of knowing that life is purposeful and good for us is alluded to in the opening words of Genesis:

Ba'al HaTurim (one of the great Sages of the fifteenth century) writes that the last letters of the three opening words of Genesis form the word "*emes*" which means truth.

The second word of the Torah—the one that follows *Bereishis*—is *bara*, which is related to the word *berius,* which means health. This alludes to the fact that having a sense of purpose and meaning in life simultaneously brings one closer to the truth [even as one enjoys] and to a more healthful way of living.

Torah and Israel

But this realization must be followed by an equally important awareness about the purpose in creation. What is the meaning of our lives? How do we find it? The answers are found in the second part of the word *Bereishis*:

The purpose, as Rashi states, is Torah and Israel. All of our lives must revolve around the realization that our vast universe exists so that the light of Torah would illuminate its every nook and cranny. This goal, in turn, can be accomplished by the Jewish people who were charged at Mount Sinai with the responsibility to bring the light of Torah to the entire universe.

No Conflict

A corollary of this second realization is that the world cannot truly conflict with either of these two entities, Torah or Israel (See *Likkutei Sichos*, beginning of volume one).

In simple language this means that if one confronts a situation wherein the exigencies of life appear to conflict with the dictates of the Torah, one should consider this: How can

the creation of the world by G-d possibly conflict with its very purpose and raison d'être? We must, therefore, conclude that the conflict is in our minds and not in reality. It is only a test to imagine that there is an inherent incompatibility between the world and Judaism.

To be sure, there are major challenges that we must confront. There are all sorts of obstacles that we must surmount. But, we are assured that there is no challenge or obstacle that will frustrate our mission.

The same can be said when we confront anti-Semitism. When we survey Jewish history, we may become overcome with a sense of resignation. We begin to believe that it is our lot to always be persecuted. The world is simply not a hospitable place for Jews. In its mild form, this reflection is responsible for our lack of enthusiasm for our Jewishness. In its more virulent form, this defeatist conclusion may lead to the total abandonment of one's Jewish identity.

The word *Bereishis* emphatically repudiates any such notion. On the contrary, the very purpose for which the entire universe was created was for the Torah and the Jewish

people. It is simply unthinkable, then, that the universe should fundamentally conflict with them.

The Messianic Age

One may still argue. How are we to deal with all the conflicts that we confront? Are we imagining things? How can we dismiss the suffering and pain as figments of our imagination?

The answer is that the reality of anything hinges on its power of endurance. The obstacles—including human suffering—are a temporary phenomenon that will cease in the future Messianic Age. In addition, it is Judaism's belief that when the world was created, it was an inherently good and peaceful world. And, ultimately, the world will revert to that "Garden of Eden" scenario.

All the time "in between" Creation and the Messianic Age, our mission is to reveal and demonstrate the inherent harmony that exists between G-d, the Torah and the world that we inhabit. By doing that, we actually generate the energies that remove the

obstacles and usher in the Era of Redemption.

Hints of Moshiach

As stated, the very opening word of the Torah— "because"—implies that the world was created with a plan in mind.

Where, in the opening words of the Torah, is it hinted that the plan will come to fruition during the Messianic Age, when all the conflicts, particularly the conflicts between our world and Torah, will ultimately disappear?

One hint can be found in the very first word of *Bereishis* itself. The Zohar states that this word is a composite of two Aramaic words: *Bara-shis*, which means "He Created Six," an allusion to the six millennia that will precede the coming of Moshiach, paralleling the six days that precede the Sabbath.

The very first word of the Torah thus informs us that the purpose of the creation of the world will be realized, through our efforts, within these six millennia. (We are presently at the end of the sixth millennium,

on the very threshold of Moshiach.) After that time, we will enjoy the fruit of our labor.

May we see the coming of Moshiach and the true and complete Redemption imminently!

ESSAY FOUR

THE FIRST LETTER AND BEGINNING ON PAGE TWO

Unity is central to Judaism: One G-d, one Torah, One Jewish nation.

Yet, the Torah begins with the letter *beis,* which is the number two.

It's G-d's way of saying "I want a relationship with you."

It's what makes the connection between G-d and His world.

ESSAY FOUR

THE FIRST LETTER AND BEGINNING ON PAGE TWO

Importance of the First Letter

Beginnings are important. Beginnings of important and seminal works are even more important. Can one then even doubt the importance of the **beginning** of the word ***Bereishis,*** which means **beginning,** of the parsha named ***Bereishis*** (**beginning**) of the book entitled ***Bereishis*-beginning** or Genesis?

Genesis begins with the word *Bereishis* and the word *Bereishis* begins with the letter *beis*. The Talmud (Jerusalem Talmud, notes that the letter *beis* is the **second** letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and raises the question: Why does the Torah not begin with an *aleph*, the **first** letter of the alphabet?

Why Should we Begin with an Aleph?

There are many answers to this question. But before we cite one of the answers, let us attempt to better comprehend the question.

Why would it have been better for the Torah to commence with the letter *aleph*? Does it really matter if the Torah begins with any one letter?

In truth it does make a difference.

By beginning the world's most important document with a given letter, we are compelled to derive a crucial lesson. If—as the Ba'al Shem Tov said, "We must learn a lesson from **every** occurrence"—how much more imperative, then, that we learn a lesson from something mentioned in the Torah? It is even more obvious that there must be an important lesson in the Torah's choice of letters, to commence the Divine document.

Had the Torah begun with an *aleph* (the first letter of the alphabet and the letter that in Hebrew is also the number one), it would have underscored the singularity of the Torah; that there is a one and only Torah just like there is a one and only G-d.

Indeed, at first blush, it makes no sense for the *one* Torah to begin with the letter *beis*—the number that signifies division, discord and multiplicity—instead of beginning with the letter *aleph* that signifies unity, uniqueness and indivisibility.

The Paradox

To answer this question, we must reflect on the paradoxical nature of Torah. Torah is, first and foremost, G-d's wisdom. But, the Torah is also a book that was given to people who reside in a physical and material world

Were the Torah to begin with an *aleph*, we would have been made aware of the Torah's singular divine nature. We would not have appreciated, however, the entire scope of the Torah. Torah, while never loses its divine nature, even as humans study it and implement its teachings into their daily lives; Torah continues to be relevant to our lives and times.

By beginning the Torah with the letter *beis* that signifies duality, the Torah thus conveys the notion that it is simultaneously a divine-other-worldly document and an eminently relevant teaching.

There are those who might deny or under-emphasize the role of G-d in the Torah. To them, Torah is but a human document; a beautiful work of literature and poetry, with an important message. Others subscribe to the divinity of the Torah but deny or fail to appreciate the Torah's ability to inform us

about even the most mundane and trivial aspects of our private lives.

Torah is either reduced to an ancient work, whose archaic teachings have been superseded and replaced by modern society, or placed on a pedestal, intimating that it is too lofty for us to use in our daily lives.

Tragically, an argument often heard from some of the most religious elements in our community is that we should not try to mix the Torah with the issues that confront modern society. Whether we denigrate Torah or put it on a pedestal, we strip the Torah of its true value and relevance to our lives.

Bricklaying

The letter *beis* is also related to the Hebrew word *bayis* that means house. By studying the Torah and by observing its Mitzvos, we create a "home" for G-d.

This interpretation that *beis* refers to a house, and the one that *beis* alludes to the idea of duality are actually complementary.

In order to realize the goal of making the world into a home for the Divine, the Torah must be understood to be, paradoxically, a

thoroughly G-dly message that can "take up residence" in our human abode without compromising either our G-d or our humanity.

To connect G-d and our world—which is, essentially, what a house for G-d is; a place where the divine and mundane can not only co-exist peacefully but also synthesize and harmonize—one needs to know that the Torah must be relevant to every aspect of our lives. To build a *bayis*, one must have a *beis.*

If we were to create a dichotomy between Torah and our physical existence by declaring that Torah is an *aleph*, a singular Divine entity that has no relevance to our world, we could never build a house for G-d, and the very purpose of creation would be thwarted.

Blessings and Curses

Perhaps this is what our Talmudic Sages had in mind when they answered the question of why the Torah begins with a *beis* rather with an *aleph* in this way: *Aleph* is the initial of the word *arur* which means curse, whereas

beis is the initial of the word *beracha* which means blessing.

Ibn Ezra raises the obvious question: Aren't there positive words that begin with an *aleph* and negative words that begin with a *beis*?

In light of the above analysis of the letter *beis*, this question can be answered. When people put the Torah on a pedestal, claiming that it is too sublime for it to have real meaning in the context of their reality, they are seeing Torah exclusively as an *aleph;* they cannot prevent the curses from our world.

When, however, we recognize the duality of Torah—that Torah is a *beis,* simultaneously, a sublime Divine document and an eminently relevant one—we can transform the curses of life into blessings. Then, and only then, will Torah be the source of blessings, exclusively.

[See *Likkutei Sichos* volume 15, where the Rebbe gives a different but related explanation to the selection of the letter *beis* and its relationship with *beracha*.]

The Original Plan

The word *Bereishis* has also been divided by our sages into two words: "*Rosh Bayis*-The

first thing is the home." Alternatively, it may be rendered: The home was G-d's original and primary purpose for creating the world. This, too, has dual meaning: Our goal is to create a Jewish home. This, in turn, enables us to make the universe G-d's home.

Since G-d is perfect and infinite, it follows that G-d's plan of making this universe a "dwelling place" for Himself, will certainly come to fruition. This will occur, our Sages tell us, when Moshiach will usher in the Messianic Age. At that time, all of our human efforts that involve Torah and Mitzvot will have completed the structure, "brick by brick", Mitzvah by Mitzvah. The "*beis*-house" (read: universe) will finally be completed because it will house both G-d and those of us whose efforts transformed the universe into a dwelling place for G-d (*beis-two*).

A Principle of Faith

This is one of the reasons the belief in the coming of Moshiach, who will usher in the Messinaic Age, is considered by Maimonides to be one the Thirteen Principles of Faith.

Why is this belief so pivotal to Judaism? Why can't we be good Jews without the emphasis on the coming of Moshiach?

If we were to posit that the world will just continue aimlessly, never to become a dwelling place for G-d, that would mean that G-d's plan was ill-devised, G-d forbid. Obviously, belief in the Messianic Age validates our belief in G-d's omnipotence. To be sure, we have free choice as individuals to decide whether to perform the individual Mitzvah that forms one of the building-blocks of G-d's "palace." Nevertheless, G-d has so structured our universe that the cumulative effort of all of our Mitzvos will ultimately culminate with the Redemption.

If belief in Moshiach were merely a belief in ultimate reward it would not have been included in the Thirteen Principles of Faith. But belief in Moshiach is actually belief that G-d's plan for our universe will succeed. Belief in Moshiach is belief that our actions count and that Torah and Mitzvot will ultimately change the world.

The Time of Your Redemption has Arrived!

The Lubavitcher Rebbe has declared that we have reached that milestone. Our collective and cumulative efforts—over the last few thousand years—have placed us on the threshold of the Era of Redemption. Even one Mitzvah, the Rebbe states, citing the Talmud (Kiddushin 40b) and Maimonides (Hilchos Teshuvah,), can be the final Mitzvah that pushes us and the entire universe over the top.

When we have questions about the value of a particular Mitzvah, we ought to consider that perhaps that one Mitzvah will be the most important Mitzvah ever perormed! It may be the one that will validate G-d's original plan and make this world the world G-d had intended it to be at the very beginning of creation. That solitary act of goodness and kindness can turn all of the curses of the past into the greatest blessings.

All this is alluded to in the opening letter of the Torah—the *beis.*

ESSAY FIVE

THE FIRST WORD REVISITED

Ours is a world of falsehood.

Torah is the very essence of objective and absolute truth.

By connecting to the Torah we can transform our falsehood into truth.

ESSAY FIVE

THE FIRST WORD REVISITED

Falsehood 613?!

The Torah begins with the word: *Bereishis*, translated as "In the beginning."

Much has been said of how the first word of the Torah encapsulates some of the most basic tenets of Judaism [see preceding essays].

Indeed, the word *Bereishis* contains within it the word *Rosh*, which means head. And just as the head is not just the most important part of the human anatomy, but it also contains the brain that generates the energy for and exercises control over all other parts of the body, so too, *Bereishis*, which is the "head" of the Torah, reflects the energy of the entire Torah.

Rabbi Moshe Sofer, one of the great Jewish scholars of the nineteenth century and author of the classic work of Jewish law, *Chasam Sofer*, discusses one of the many hints contained in the word *Bereishis*.

Bereishis, he writes, contains the Hebrew letter *shin*. The balance of the word *Bereishis* contains five other letters that numerically add up to 613—the total number of commandments in the Torah.

What is the significance of the letter shin and its juxtaposition to the number 613?

According to the *Chasam Sofer*, the letter *shin* (spelled phonetically) is an acronym for three Hebrew words *shem Hashem nikra*- "the name of G-d is invoked." Thus the entire word *Bereishis* conveys the following idea: When we observe the 613 commandments, we enable G-d's name to be expressed through us.

One may raise an interesting question about the significance of the letter *shin* appearing in the first word of the Torah.

The letter *shin,* the Zohar states, is also the initial of—and therefore signifies—the word *sheker*-falsehood. How can it be that the opening word of the Torah should allude to falsehood? And how can the letter *shin*, which signifies falsehood, be situated in a word wherein all of its other letters correspond to the 613 commandments? How

can we reconcile falsehood with G-d's commandments?

The Duality of Torah

The answer lies in a better understanding of the first word and letter of the Torah. Our Sages raised the question: why does the Torah begin with the letter *beis*—the second letter of the Alphabet—and not with the letter *aleph*, the first letter? The question is predicated on the notion that the numerical value of the letter *beis* is two, while *aleph* is numerically the number one. Why then would the Torah, which is G-d's wisdom, begin with a number that suggests duality, and not with the letter and number one that suggests unity? (See preceding Essay).

One answer to the question is that there are two dimensions of Torah: Torah in its pristine form, where it is united with G-d, and Torah that was "sent" by its Author to affect our fragmented world and bring unity into multiplicity, order and harmony into chaos. This is not a suggestion that there are two Torahs, but that Torah, when introduced into our consciousness, has the capacity to change the world.

Bereishis, by virtue of it beginning with the letter *beis* that connotes division, thus conveys the message that Torah belongs to our world precisely because our world is inherently false and dualistic, while G-d's Torah is inherently true and unified. It is the word *Bereishis* that introduces G-d's creation of a world that is obstructive of His presence and allows for the emergence of falsehood. And yet, within *Bereishis,* one discovers the power of the Torah to reverse the process by its commandments.

The simple message conveyed to us from the above is:

Left to its own devices, the world is devoid of absolute truth. Truth will always elude those who seek it, if they seek it from within the framework of creation itself. In order to introduce truth to the world, it must be introduced to the world by the Creator. This is, of course, the function of the 613 Divine commandments.

One may still ask a follow-up question: Granted the allusion to falsehood in the first word of *Bereishis* is to suggest how the Torah and its commandments is designed to transform the falsehood of the world into

truth, but wouldn't it have been more desirable to begin the Torah with a word that signifies truth, without reference to falsehood?

True Truth

To answer this question we must examine the premise of our question. The underlying assumption of this question is that pure truth is superior to truth that is introduced into, and therefore intermingles with, the environment of falsehood.

In fact, the reverse is true. When truth is not tested, there can always be a question as to whether it will survive future challenges. And if truth were to pass all the tests but fail the last one, it would not be truth at any point.

Only when an idea encounters falsehood and prevails consistently can it be said that the idea is truly true. This concept is rooted in Talmudic law that when a contract is challenged and subsequently certified by the court as authentic it is stronger than an uncontested contract.

The ultimate demonstration of the Torah's truth is that it has survived every imaginary challenge throughout the ages.

Why all the Suffering?

This explains why the Messianic Age follows thousands of years of exile. The phenomenon of exile with its attendant suffering raises a powerful question: Why did G-d have us go through so much travail?

Certainly, it does not suffice to state that it is a punishment for our misdeeds thousands of years ago. Although we say in our prayers "And because of our sins we were exiled from our land," the punishment does not fit the crime and cannot serve as the lone explanation for our languishing in exile. Furthermore, even when G-d punishes us for our sins it is not for the sake of punishment G-d forbid, but for our ability to cleanse ourselves and grow spiritually. What did we gain in exile all these thousands of years?

That Torah and the Jewish people have not only survived the twin challenges of exile, persecution and assimilation, but have

flourished, reveals the utter truth of Torah and worthiness of Israel.

Thus our Sages have stated (*Berachos*) that three things were given to us with suffering: Torah, the Land of Israel and the World to Come."

These three items share their identification with truth. Torah is called *Toras Emes*, the Torah of truth. The Land of Israel is associated with truth as it says in the Book of Psalms ( ): "Truth sprouts forth from the Land" and the "World to Come" is the period when G-d's ultimate truth will be revealed. To realize truth, it must be tested.

Thus, in the Messianic Age, we will be able to appreciate the truth of Torah even more so than we were able to fathom it in the pre-exile glorious Temple era. For only after the challenges of exile can we appreciate the full depth of the message of *Bereishis;* that the Torah is absolute truth and is undeterred by the falsehood of existence. Moreover, Torah is empowered to transform the falsehood into truth.

That realization will be fully manifest in the Messianic Age of Redemption, when the world will be liberated from its association

with falsehood in all of its forms, and unadulterated truth will be revealed.

ESSAY SIX

NEED TO BE NEEDED

We would be living in a perfect world if we could demonstrate that we are needed at least as much as we need.
The two accounts of Creation of Man reflect this balance.

ESSAY SIX
NEED TO BE NEEDED

The Tale of Two Narratives

Our parsha—*Bereishis*—is unique because it is the first parsha of the Torah. It is also arguably one of the most enigmatic sections of the Torah. In spite of the extensive treatment the creation of the world gets in this week's parsha, it remains, arguably, the most elusive narrative in the Torah (See Nachmanides' commentary on beginning of Genesis.)

One of the difficulties with the way creation is treated in the Torah is the existence of two narratives of creation that are dissimilar. It is axiomatic in Judaism that there is not even one word or letter in the Torah that is superfluous. Yet, occasionally, as in the creation narrative, we find that the Torah will discuss the same matter several times. It is obvious that the Torah wishes to impart a moral lesson for to us by repeating a story, verse or phrase.

There are at least four general approaches to the idea of repetition in the Torah: Urgency, importance, affection and general vs. specific.

An example of urgency is Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dream: "As for the repetition of the dream, it is because G-d is **hastening** to do it." Pharaoh had the same dream twice because it was G-d's way of telling him that the seven years of famine—that were alluded to in his dream—would begin very soon.

An example of a repetition that is due to stringency is the repetition of certain laws, such as the Sabbath. The reason the Torah repeats the prohibition of working on the Sabbath is to underscore its importance.

When the Torah tells of how Eliezer, Abraham's servant, found a suitable wife for Isaac, the Torah repeats this narrative. Rashi, citing the Talmud, explains that the stories that involved the Patriarchs were very dear to G-d. As a sign of affection, the story, in vivid detail, is repeated.

This approach can also explain why the story concerning the building of the Mishkan-Tabernacle is repeated several times. The Tabernacle was very dear to the Jewish

people and to G-d. The construction of G-d's "dwelling place," was an indication that G-d was willing to reconnect to the Jewish people after the golden calf affair. It can be compared to a person who was separated from his wife and then was reconciled with her. The experience is so precious that one cannot stop talking about it.

The creation narrative is repeated, Rashi explains, because the Torah first gives us a general overview of the subject of creation and then the Torah focuses on some of its details.

And while Rashi's explanation is simple and straightforward, one can probe beneath the surface meaning of the text and detect an even more profound understanding of the differences that exist between version number one and version number two that justify the repetition of this story.

Don't Faint! Be Needed!

To understand the difference between the two narratives of Creation the following anecdote will be helpful.

A very learned follower of the great Chassidic Master, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (the founder of the Chabad movement) also known as the Alter Rebbe, came to his mentor with a list of needs and requests. He wanted the holy rabbi to pray that G-d grant him his requests. The rabbi gave him a penetrating look and said: "You write what you need, you do not write why you are needed." Upon hearing these sharp words from his holy teacher, the man fainted. He realized how self-centered he was. When he was revived he devoted the next few weeks to profound introspection and his whole life changed.

Adam the First: The Entire World was Created for Me

When one views the first narrative of creation, particularly, the section about the creation of Adam, we see what the relationship a human being has with the rest of the world. Everything was created before man so that it could serve his needs, as the Torah states explicitly that Adam would exercise dominion over all the other

creatures. The Talmud (Sanhedrin) echoes this sentiment when it declares:

> `"Why was man created alone? To teach us that everybody is required to say, 'The world was created for me.'"

This was clearly a description of how G-d provided for the needs of the human being.

Adam the Second: Custodian of the World

The second version of creation, where the creation of Adam precedes the description of the creation of the animals and plants, is about why Adam was needed.

What was Adam's role in the world? The Torah answers this in several ways: He was needed to cultivate the earth and to make vegetation grow; he was needed to name the creatures; and, he was needed to work on the Garden of Eden and protect it.

Figuratively, this means that G-d appointed the human being as the custodian of the world, to make sure that the world conforms to G-d's idea of a Garden of Eden. G-d wants a Paradise here on earth, so He created us to make that possible and to preserve it for the future.

A reminder of this second role of Adam can also be found in the statement of the Talmud (*Sanhedrin*) that a person should not become too haughty because "even a gnat preceded you." Adam was the very last creature because his task was to serve the rest of the world. When we fail to serve the world in accordance with our G-d given responsibilities, we should realize that we are inferior to all creatures.

Messianic Age: Adam 1 and Adam 11 combined

We are living in unique times. Both narratives—or descriptions and definitions of the human being—are being fleshed out in the world around us.

Frequently, the two narratives compete for our allegiance. Narrative number one that sees Adam's entitlement is not interested in Adam's role as a servant. Conversely, the Adam 11 type cannot enjoy the world he or she serves.

How does one reconcile the two diametrically opposite perspectives? Either 1 am here to be served or to serve. How can it be both?

The answer is Shabbos!

Sandwiched in between the two Adam narratives is the Sabbath.

Shabbos is simultaneously the culmination of the work week and the beginning of a new week. Even as we enjoy the fruit of our labor on Shabbos, Shabbos elevates us to see the world from a Divine perspective that removes the obsession with our own interests and rights. Shabbos helps us focus on the spiritual and selfless dimension of our personalities. Shabbos then infuses the forthcoming week with the sensitivity associated with Adam II.

We are now living on that threshold in which we make the transition from Adam I to Adam II. More precisely, the Messianic Age—which is referred to as the Shabbos of existence—enables us to perfect and synthesize the two Adams.

We are already seeing evidence of this fusion in the world. On the one hand, the human being has achieved such scientific prowess that he can control all of nature to serve his needs. But, simultaneously, we have reached the point in the world's development where a growing number of people recognize the

human being's need to make the world into not just a civilized world, but a world of goodness and kindness.

We are now on the verge of seeing how the original plan for the world to become a "dwelling place," for G-d, or a veritable Garden of Eden, is soon to be realized with the imminent coming of Moshiach. Moshiach will restore the world to the state of Paradise that existed when Adam was first created.

ESSAY SEVEN

G-D'S PREFERENCE

There are two approaches to disciplining others. One can use light tactics or dark tactics.

The Messianic Era is an Age of light.

Preparing for it prefers using the "light" approach.

ESSAY SEVEN

G-D'S PREFERENCE

Light or Darkness, Which do You Prefer?

When the Torah discusses the creation of light in this week's parsha of *Bereishis,* with which the Torah commences, it states:

> "G–d called the light day and the darkness He called night, and G-d saw the light that it was good."

The Midrash provides a rather enigmatic interpretation of this verse:

> "'And G-d called the light day'—this refers to the deeds of the righteous.
>
> '...and G-d called the darkness night'—this refers to the deeds of the wicked.
>
> Which of these does G-d prefer?
>
> The Torah thus says: 'G-d saw the light that it was good.'"

On the surface it sounds like the Midrash has entertained the possibility that G-d prefers darkness-the deeds of the wicked over light-the deeds of the righteous. And while the

Midrash concludes that G-d does indeed favor light over darkness, it is incredulous that it could have suggested otherwise.

Can there possibly be a contest between light and darkness, good and evil?

Deeds of the Wicked

Among the various explanation of this puzzling Midrash we find one offered by the great Chassidic Master, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, known for his boundless love and passion for the triad: G-d, Torah and Israel (whose 200th yahrtzeit we observed this past Tuesday, the 25th of Tishrei).

In his work *Kedushat Levi* he explains that the Midrash certainly is not suggesting that G-d might prefer evil. Rather the emphasis should be placed on the word "deeds" of the wicked.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak proceeds to explain that the deeds of the wicked are a reference to the tactics employed by evil people that can be used against evil itself by righteous people. For example, evil people are consumed with hatred for others and frequently explode in anger against those who get in their way. The

righteous can also try to combat evil and force the evil doers to mend their ways by issuing strong words of condemnation of their behavior. The righteous might want to show the evil how much they hate their evil ways and express their anger against them.

The other approach to influence others employs the very opposite strategy. The righteous will shower love on those who are hateful and befriend those who are far from G-d. This approach is the approach of light, in contradistinction to the other approach—even if it was to work—which is the approach of darkness. Both approaches can be effective.

And here the Midrash asks rhetorically: which of these two approaches is preferable?

The Midrash reads the answer to this question into the Biblical text: "G-d saw the light that it was good." The conclusion is that the approach of light is the preferred approach. Even if we could break the evil by using evil's own tactics of hatred and anger, we are better off attempting to change the evil by utilizing the approach of light and love.

The Heart of Tanya

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (the founder of the Chabad Chassidic movement and a close colleague of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev) in his classic work, Tanya sheds further light (no pun intended) on this subject. Without referring to the Midrash explicitly he writes in the 32nd chapter (known as the heart) of the Tanya that when a person employs the approach of love in the attempt to rehabilitate a sinner, even if he fails he nevertheless has fulfilled a Mitzvah of loving your fellow.

The obvious inference from this is that, by contrast, if one tries the alternate approach of heaping derision on evildoers and expressing hatred and anger to the evil and then fails, they have achieved nothing.

Hallmark of Chassidic Movement

This message conveyed by Rabbi Levi Yitzchak and the Tanya is the hallmark of the Chassidic movement founded by the Ba'al Shem Tov, and eminently personified by Rabbi Levy Yitzchak himself. In all his dealings, even with the most rebellious Jews,

he always employed the approach of light and love. He always saw the good in everyone.

The classic story that describes Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's approach is the one where he sees a Jew brazenly smoking in front of the synagogue on Yom Kippur.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak lovingly approaches him and suggests that perhaps he forgot that it was Yom Kippur. When he replied that he did in fact know that it was Yom Kippur, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak persisted:

> "Perhaps, you don't know that it is forbidden to smoke on the holiest day of the year?"

Again the man responded that he was well aware of the seriousness of the prohibition.

> "Then, perhaps, the doctor ordered you to smoke because you are suffering from a serious ailment?"

The man dismisses this possibility and declared that he was in the best of health.

Upon hearing the man's defiance in his dismissal of Judaism, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak turns his eyes heavenward and says to G-d:

> "Look how wonderful your children are. Even when they sin they cannot tell a lie..."

The approach of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak might seem extreme and unrealistic. Indeed, he personified the ultimate level of love for one's fellow. Our job is to look to him as our role model and incorporate, at least in some small measure, his positive and loving approach in our own lives.

Approach of Light: Preparation for Moshiach

The verse cited by the Midrash that served as the springboard for Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's commentary—and perhaps even the basis for his own obsession with light and love—is the verse that speaks of the creation of the light that existed in the first day of creation—even before G-d created the sun. Our Sages teach us that this light will be fully revealed in the Messianic Age. This light, unlike sunlight, will enable us to see beneath the veneer of the other and discover their inherent goodness.

As we get closer to the coming of Moshiach it is even more imperative that we move closer to his model. Indeed, one of the

qualifications for Moshiach is that he constantly looks for the good in everyone.

How do we reveal Moshiach?

By revealing the spark of Moshiach in each and every one of us. And that we do—among other things—by emulating his positive approach of love and warmth.

ESSAY EIGHT

GATHERING THE SPARKS

G-d destroyed worlds before creating ours.

We emulate G-d by removing the limiting structures we impose on ourselves.

ESSAY EIGHT

GATHERING THE SPARKS

"This world appeals to Me."

When the Al-mighty created the universe, our Sages of the Midrash inform us, He was not happy with His first product.

> "He would build universes and then destroy them."

Finally, G-d created the world we inhabit and said,

> "[While] [t]hose did not appeal to me, this one does appeal to me."

This passage, obviously, begs for further clarification. Why would an all-knowing G-d have to experiment with creation until He found a world that suited Him? Couldn't he create a world that He wanted from the very outset?

Certain commentators understood this passage literally and have used it as a way of attempting to reconcile the scientific age of the universe with the traditional one. In their

opinion, the fossils are remnants from an earlier world that was destroyed.

In addition to the difficulty in using this passage as a way of explaining the fossils—how did the fossils survive a world that was destroyed?—the words of the Midrash were never understood in a literal fashion.

Indeed, the masters of Kabbalah have devoted much attention to this matter and explain that G-d did not actually create worlds and then destroy them. These are not physical worlds that the Midrash is referring to, rather it refers to spiritual realms that exist even now, that are being created and destroyed all the time. And every aspect of life is a product of the twin dynamic of destruction and creation.

The Paradox of Physical Life

In effect, the building and destroying of these "worlds" are responsible for the paradoxical nature of physical existence. Embedded within every material object in our world are sparks of holiness that have "fallen" here from these destroyed worlds; worlds that are

pregnant with powerful spiritual forces, but have no means to articulate them.

This process is referred to in the literature of Kabbalah as "*sheviras hakeilim*, the shattering of the vessels." As a result of this "power outage" that resulted from a disproportionate surge of energy, we have a world in which the remnant sparks of that sublime world have found refuge in all physical matter.

The question arises: what is the purpose in having these sparks hidden in physical matter? If, for all intents and purposes, physical objects remain physical, of what benefit is the knowledge that all physical matters contain these sparks? And why did G-d allow these sparks to become "hostages" to a lowly material world?

Liberation by way of liberating the "sparks"

The answer to these questions is that we have the capacity to "liberate" these sparks, thereby unleashing untold positive Divine energy into our ordinary world. These powerful G-dly forces were deliberately introduced into our world in a way that

doesn't overwhelm us, and is also accessible to us.

In simple terms, even the most mundane, material and physical object is laden with spiritual potential that can be unleashed when we use the physical object for a spiritual purpose.

For example, every time we take money and give it to *tzedakah*, we "liberate" those sublime sparks of holiness that were embedded in the money. These unleashed spiritual powers energize us and the world around us. When enough of this concealed G-dly energy is revealed, the world cannot help but [to] change for the good and we then usher in the future Redemption.

By liberating the sparks in every physical object, we ultimately bring liberation and Redemption to the entire world.

Thus, according to Kabbalah, thus, every positive **action** changes the world drastically and leads to its ultimate redemption. Good **thoughts**, by contrast, while they can be the motivation and impetus for good deeds, do not possess the same power to liberate these sparks and change the world. It is the physical action utilizing the body and physical

objects that possess an infinitely greater capacity to change the world for the better and bring about its radical transformation into a G-dly world.

Emulating G-d

There is room for further reflection, however. We were commanded to emulate G-d. "Just as G-d is compassionate, so shall we be compassionate. Just as G-d is kind and forgiving, so shall we be kind, etc.," (Talmud) declare our Sages. It follows then, that just as G-d builds and creates, so shall we be constructive and creative in all of our endeavors.

The question then is, how do we emulate G-d when it comes to His building worlds and destroying them? What good can there be in destructive behavior?

There are actually several levels of positive destruction. First and foremost, we have a need to eliminate the transgressions and the evil impulses that foster them, which create a barrier between ourselves and G-d. Despite the fact that G-d created the opportunities to do evil, we are enjoined not to take advantage

of them. We must not hesitate to negate and destroy these "worlds" of opportunity.

And just as when G-d did His act of destruction, it resulted in the introduction of powerful energies within the physical world, similarly, when we destroy the worlds of un-holiness, obstruction and transgression, we unleash G-dly energy that is concealed within the forbidden substance or action.

Indeed, according to the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidus, when we resist the temptation to do evil, we unleash even more formidable spiritual energies than when we do good. When we perform a positive act, we generate a commensurate measure of Divine energy, one that can be "captured" by our finite actions.

The hidden Divine energy that we generate by resisting temptation, by contrast, generates a more transcendent and unconventional aspect of G-d; an aspect that cannot be captured by our finite action, but only by our passive resistance to evil.

Destroying by Eclipsing

One can also apply the lesson of "building and destroying worlds" to positive efforts as well. No matter how much we build constructively, we must never rest on our laurels. Not only should our increased efforts exceed our previous record, they must be so dramatic that they eclipse the former levels of goodness. In relation to the new efforts, the original ones are as if they never existed- "destroyed."

By constantly creating and then "destroying" our world, we unleash G-d's reciprocal ability to refashion our world in ways that are exponentially better than that which existed previously.

Messianic Quantum Leaps

This is what the Messianic Age is all about. Not only will we grow from "strength to strength" in our spiritual awareness, in the construction of G-dly universes, but, we will be able to reach infinitely greater heights, making previous levels, by comparison, seem as if they did not even exist.

We will then become full partners with G-d in the creation of the universe, for we too will "build worlds and destroy them."

However, "destroying" the previous limited institutions in order to extract the sparks from them is still not the ideal.

In the Messianic Age, after completing the task of "liberating the sparks," the Kabbalists tell us, our focus will turn to "unifying the Divine forces," which will reveal even more sublime G-dly light.

In truth, the Rebbe informed us that we have already accomplished enough of the unleashing of the sparks through the separation of good from evil. We are therefore now ready for the Final Redemption. Now our focus is "welcoming Moshiach," by accepting and internalizing the Messianic energies that have already been unleashed.

ESSAY NINE

WHOSE LAND IS IT?

Every nation is entitled to have a land for itself.

Only one nation has an inseparable and qualitative bond with its land:

The Land of Israel for the People of Israel.

ESSAY NINE

WHOSE LAND IS IT?

Why Open Torah with Story of Creation?

Rashi, the greatest Bible commentator, begins his classic commentary on the Torah with a question as to why the Torah opens with the narrative of creation and not with the commandments that first appear in the Book of Exodus.

Rashi, the Rebbe explains (*Likkutei Sichos* Volume 5) is troubled by the Torah's choice for its opening verse, as well as the entire Book of Genesis. Torah is a book of directives to us, not a history book. Why then does it devote an entire book of Genesis to the history of the world?

Furthermore, Torah is G-d's communication to Israel. Accordingly, it should have begun with the first **commandment** that was addressed specifically to the **Jewish** people. This commandment concerning the establishment of the New Moon does not appear until the Book of Exodus. Why was it then necessary for the Torah to preface this

commandment with the account of creation and subsequent events?

P.R. to the Nations

Rashi's answer is that, indeed, the Book of Genesis, especially its opening statement, was intended to give us **practical** guidance as to how we should defend our claim to the Land of Israel. The entire Book of Genesis was recorded in anticipation of the charge that would be made by the Nations of the World with respect to the Jewish People's claim on Israel. In Rashi's own words:

> "[I]f the nations of the world will say to Israel, 'you are bandits, for you conquered the lands of the Seven Nations, we say to them: 'All of the earth belongs to the Holy One, Blessed is He. He created it and gave to whomever He preferred. Of His own volition He gave it to them, and then of His own volition He took it from them and gave it to us.'"

Hypocricy?

At first blush, the charge of the nations is both ludicrous and hypocritical. Firstly, why are **they** so concerned about the Canaanite tribes' displacement from Israel?

Secondly, haven't all the nations conquered other nations? Was Israel the first and last people to conquer land? Almost every inch of inhabited earth was once inhabited by another group that was displaced by a conquering nation. Why should Israel be the only one to be charged with theft?

Thirdly, Israel was indeed originally in the hands of the Semites and was subsequently conquered by the Canaanites (See Genesis). Wasn't this charge sheer hypocrisy? Why bother responding to it?

The Complaint of the Nations

In truth, the Rebbe explains (ibid.) the complaint of the nations is not about the propriety of the actual conquest, but as to the **character** of the conquest.

When every other nation conquered another country, it did not fundamentally change the nature of the land it conquered. Moreover,

even after the conquest occurred, it left room for it to be reversed by some other nation.

By contrast, once the Jewish people conquered the Land of Israel, it became an irreversible possession of the Jewish people. It became a land that possesses a soul and a special character that distinguishes it from any other place on earth.

In addition, once conquered, the Land **of** Israel is forever the Land **for** Israel. It can never revert to another nation. And even if it were conquered—which occurred several times in its history—it remains the eternal possession of the Jewish people.

It is this that all the nations of the world find most disconcerting. They protest: "You've conquered the land, in the most absolute sense of the word, unlike any other nation's conquest."

The nations of the world, not just the descendants of the ancient Canaanites, are troubled by the nature of the Jewish People's claim to Israel. It is an absolute, permanent and exclusive claim, unlike any other nation's claim to their land.

The Secret of the Jewish People's Connection to Israel

Why **is** Israel's (the people) relationship with Israel (the Land), qualitatively different from all other nation's relationships to their lands?

The answer, the Rebbe explains, lies in the key word "all," in Rashi's phrase: "**All** of the earth belongs to the Holy One, Blessed is He." In Hebrew the word *kol* means all, but it also could be translated as "the totality." Not only does the entire world, geographically speaking, belong to G-d, but the **quality** and nature of the world is also His.

When G-d created the world, He decided the character of the world as well. And He decided that the character of Israel would be qualitatively different from every other country. It was not that G-d allowed Israel's status to be altered, but at the very beginning, G-d created Israel the Land to be best suited for Israel the People.

In other words, the Land of Israel is a Land like no other, because it possesses a spiritual dimension that makes it compatible with only the People of Israel.

The Master Plan

To explain: When G-d created the world He did so with a purpose and a plan. The objective was for the entire world to become a receptive and hospitable place for G-d; a natural world that expresses its Creator's presence and serves His interests.

Thus, when we look at any piece of "real estate" it has two dimensions: The way it is and the way it must be transformed.

There is one land, however, that was created in a way that, from the very outset, one could see evidence of the finished product. When we view the Land of Israel, its history and geography, we see through the physicality and are immediately convinced of its holiness.

To be sure, we have free choice and we can choose to deny Israel's true G-dly nature, but that would be short-lived. The Land of Israel demands of its inhabitants to appreciate its lofty status. When, as a people, we failed in that regard, the Land "spit us out." While in the rest of the world it is natural to be materialistic, the nature of Israel is to be spiritual.

And while it takes an unnatural force of resistance to tame the world outside of Israel,

it takes an unnatural force to negate the spiritual state of the Land of Israel.

Moreover, Israel's unique status is what energizes us to transform the entire world into a place that naturally reflects its Divine essence.

The challenge we have in exile is to instill the natural holiness of the Land of Israel into every nook and cranny of the world. This we accomplish, of course, by performing the physical Mitzvos-commandments that instill holiness even into the mundane.

The end result of these efforts is a world that is entirely Israel. This, indeed, will occur in the Messianic Age, at which time Israel will be the source of inspiration for the rest of the world, enabling it to grow to even greater heights.

Rashi and the Crusaders; Modern Day Israel and Moshiach

Rashi lived during the period of the Crusades when the issue of the sovereignty of Israel obsessed the world. Christians and Moslems were fighting over the Holy Land. At that time, Rashi made it clear that the land is G-

d's and was given irrevocably to the Jewish people.

In the present day and age, as we get closer to the coming of Moshiach, when our sovereignty over Israel will be fully vindicated, the challenge of the Nations of the World to the Jewish People's claim to Israel becomes more pronounced; their voices more shrill in their condemnation of Israel.

This is consistent with the understanding that the closer we get to the Messianic Age, when the forces of evil will be removed, these forces mount their last stand, as it were. It is their "going out of business sale." Similarly, the forces that want to prevent the cementing of our relationship with Israel, are mustering all their resources in this effort.

It is now as important as ever to respond to these challenges with our proud restatement of Rashi's words. Instead of apologizing for our claim to Israel, the Jewish People have the responsibility and the privilege to assert their G-d given obligation to the Land of Israel. Not only will we be doing our part in preparing ourselves for the coming of Moshiach, this message will ultimately penetrate and the Nations of the World will

all concede that the Land of Israel is the eternal inheritance of the People of Israel.

As we start the new book of Genesis, let us hope and pray that this year will be one in which peace will prevail, with the imminent arrival of Moshiach and the commencement of the Final Redemption!

ESSAY TEN

A NEW WORLD

One of the greatest miracles of nature is the birth of a child.
Judaism wants us to procreate in intellectual and spiritual ways as well.
This will prepare us for the "New Age" of Moshiach

ESSAY TEN

A NEW WORLD

First and Last Mitzvah

The Torah contains 613 commandments (Mitzvot). The so-called collection of "Ten Commandments," was the first set of declarations G-d made to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai, were the foundation of all the other commandments that appear in the Torah.

The first Mitzvah mentioned in the Torah is in this week's parsha of *Bereishis,* to "Be fruitful and multiply." This command was spoken to Adam, the progenitor of all of humanity, repeated to Noach after the flood, but was eventually given to the Jewish people as their special responsibility.

The very last Mitzvah mentioned in the Torah—the 613th—is to write a Sefer Torah, a Torah scroll. According to some authorities acquiring other Torah books such as the Talmud and all of the commentaries on the Torah etc. are the equivalent to writing a

Torah scroll because owning Torah books facilitates Torah study.

In light of the Kabbalistic teaching (*Sefer Yetzirah*) that "the end is wedged in the beginning," we should try to understand the connection between the Mitzvah of procreation and the Mitzvah of writing a Sefer Torah.

Selling a Torah for Marriage

In a legal context, the connection between these two Mitzvos is alluded to in the Talmudic ruling (*Megillah* 27a) that one may not sell a Torah scroll for any reason except to study Torah or to get married.

In other words, if one could not afford to study Torah or to get married, he may sell a Torah scroll and use the proceeds to either further his Torah education or to fund his marriage.

Now, it makes sense that one would be permitted to sell a Torah in order to study Torah. After all, of what use is the Torah scroll if one cannot study the Torah. However, it is not as clear why marriage would be a justification to sell a Torah scroll.

If one is not permitted to sell the Torah to facilitate the observance of any other Mitzvah—such as to provide for one's Shabbos and Holiday needs, purchase of a Mezuzah, pair of Tefillin, or Matzah for Passover, etc.—why would marriage be different?

The classic medieval commentary on the 613 Mitzvos known as the *Chinuch* (Mitzvah 1) provides the following simple rationale:

If not for marriage and the ensuing birth of children, one could obviously never impart the teachings of the Torah to the next generation. Of what use is a Torah scroll if there is no future generation to perpetuate its study and application to life.

An End and a Means to an End

Another technical connection between these two Mitzvos is that both of them are considered to be independent Mitzvos despite the fact that they both are prerequisites to other Mitzvos.

Writing a Torah scroll is linked to and should be followed up by the Mitzvah of Torah study, as the Torah itself asserts (Devarim

31:19). Nevertheless, when one writes a Torah scroll or commissions its writing, he is credited with a Mitzvah even if it doesn't lead to Torah study. The actual writing of the Torah scroll, though it is an accessory to Torah study, constitutes an independent Mitzvah.

In short, one fulfills this Mitzvah regardless of the outcome; even if writing the Torah scroll cannot guarantee that it will lead to its desired objective of learning from it and applying it to our lives.

Similarly the Mitzvah to procreate is an independent Mitzvah. One is obligated to engage in such actions within the context of marriage that will lead to the desired goal of having children. However, one can engage in the procreative act and not be assured of having children. Nevertheless, the obligation is to do our part and hope and pray that it will lead to the desired consequences.

The lesson is that in Judaism, the things we do to prepare for a Mitzvah are not just a means to an end. They possess intrinsic value. Everything we do to assist us in performing a Mitzvah is endowed with special meaning.

If we survey what we do most of our life it can become depressing. Most of our activities are merely accessories to something else. We eat and sleep so we can be healthy and alert to go to work, so we can earn a living, hopefully, to be able to give *Tzedakah* to a needy cause. We spend many years getting an education so we can find a job that will pay us so that we can purchase a Mezuzah to put on our doorposts.

These two Mitzvos—procreation and writing a Torah scroll—underscore the notion that even the prepatory actions that lead to a desired end are themselves Mitzvos, endowed with holiness. This realization instills new meaning, life and joy in everything we do that is directed towards a positive goal.

Torah Creates New Identity

But there is also a third and deeper connection between these two Mitzvos:

Torah study, the objective of having a Torah scroll, is the means to spiritual procreation. As our Sages state, "One who teaches one's friend's children Torah is as if he has fathered that child." (*Talmud, Sanhedrin* 19b)

Whereas the biological father contributes the physical DNA to the child, the teacher of Torah contributes the spiritual genetic material to the child. The person who studies Torah acquires a new identity and therefore the one who facilitates its study is considered to be his father.

Thus, by writing the Torah scroll—the medium through which Torah is taught to others—we fulfill the Mitzvah of being fruitful and multiplying in the spiritual sense of the word. Writing of a Torah scroll, and/or the acquisition of other Torah works, fosters Torah study and is thus akin to the person who fathers the child.

Writing a Torah is the act that brings about spiritual procreation.

Emulating G-d as a Creator

The story of creation by G-d is not restricted to the Divine Creator. Every one of us has the obligation to emulate G-d and be a Creator, by engaging not only in the Mitzvah of bringing new physical life into the world, but also by writing a Torah scroll—or by commissioning the writing of Torah scrolls,

fixing a Torah scroll, purchasing a letter in a communal Torah scroll—or/and by disseminating other Torah works and materials, which, as stated above, is the equivalent of writing a Torah scroll.

The intertwining of these two Mitzvot can be taken a step further. The purpose of bringing children into this world—physical procreation—is to lead to the teaching of Torah to them—spiritual procreation.

And conversely, the goal of writing Torah works and the resultant Torah study is to create new insights of Torah. A Jew is obligated not only to study Torah but to also innovate; discover new insights and resolve difficult passages of Torah with one's own ideas, provided, of course, they conform to the rules of Torah interpretation.

Paving the way to a New World

The Mitzvah of bringing new life has an added dimension in today's world. We are on the verge of entering into a new era of life, in the Messianic Age. The prophets describe this age as a rebirth of the world; of the heaven and the earth (Isaiah 66:22). In addition,

unprecedented new and earth shattering ideas of Torah will be discovered and revealed to all by Moshiach (See Isaiah 51:4; *Vayikra Rabbah* 13:3; *Yalkut Shimoni* Isaiah 429).

How does one bring about the rebirth of the world and the introduction of new levels of Torah knowledge?

Through our twin efforts of bringing new children into the world and new students of Torah—the fulfillment of the first and last Mitzvos of the Torah—we hasten the process when we will witness a new world; a world of perpetual holiness and goodness.

ESSAY ELEVEN

ADAM AND THE SIN OF THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT

Death and evil are not natural phenomena.

It was superimposed on us by Adam and Eve.

Life and goodness are natural.

The more good we do we separate the evil from the good and death from life.

ESSAY ELEVEN

ADAM AND THE SIN OF THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT

The Question: How could Adam have Sinned?

In *Parshas Bereishis*, the Torah tells us of the story of how Adam and Eve violated the first commandment given to humankind and they partook of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.

There is much discussion in various classical Biblical commentators as to how it was possible for Adam to commit such a grave sin. After all, Adam was "*Yetzir kapov shel Hakadosh boruch hu*-formed by G-d Himself." (See Midrash *Koheles Rabbah* 3:14) This means that not only was his soul a G-dly spirit that infused his body with life. Even his body was an exclusive creation of G-d without the "traditional" partners in procreation, a father and mother.

The question would have been a good one if it were an ordinary individual. How could any person who hears G-d tell him or her directly not to eat the fruit of a certain tree violate

His express command? How was it that specifically Adam, who was on such a high level, couldn't control himself?

The question is even greater considering the fact that, unlike us, Adam had no other commandments; couldn't he resist the temptation?

To make the question even more difficult to answer, the Rebbe in *Likutei Sichos* (volume 3), cites a passage in the Talmud ( ) that Adam was only prohibited from eating of the tree for three hours, until the onset of the first Shabbat following his creation on Friday. How could it be that Adam could not control his desire for just three hours?!

Answer One: Unparalleled Pressure

The Rebbe explains at length that precisely because Adam was on such a high level, and precisely because this sin was the most serious one—it affected all future generations of people that they would all die as a result of this sin—the *Yetzer Hara*-evil impulse was the strongest.

In all of human history, no person was pressured more into the commission of a

specific act as were Adam and Eve, precisely because no other human act carried so much weight and had the potential to have such an impact.

From this story we are taught that the more we feel pressured into doing something wrong or to neglect doing something right, the greater the indication it is as to the importance of that particular act. That realization, in turn, enables us to find the inner strength to overcome the temptation.

Answer Two: It Was All Staged

According to the Midrash, Adam and Eve really had no choice. The entire episode of the sin of the forbidden fruit was "staged" by G-d in order to introduce evil into humanity. He thus subjected Adam to unparalleled pressure, virtually guaranteeing that he would succumb to the evil, and thus enable evil to become a part and parcel of the human condition.

Since the day in which Adam and Eve sinned, everything in this world, even the good, has an intermingling of evil. Conversely, most forms of evil possess some redeeming

characteristics. All of our lives are geared towards the process of refinement and "separation;" to rarefy the good and separate the evil from its attachment to good.

Evil in the Books

If not for this sin, evil would have been a separate entity as it existed prior to Adam and Eve's sin. Without the intermingling of evil, good would naturally dominate. If that were the case, we would have no real challenge to fight with evil. Evil would have been something remote; outside of our natural experience.

It would have been comparable to reading about a vice rather than seeing it with our own eyes.

Without the "orchestrated" sin of Adam and Eve, our world would have been the world that the great Chassidic Master, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev once spoke about in one of his dialogues with G-d in which he complained:

> "Why did you create a world where the good of Gan Eden (Garden of Eden or Paradise) and the punishment

of *Gehinnom* (the Jewish version of hell) is written in the holy books, whereas the temptations to sin have been placed by You in front of us? No wonder people sin.

If You, O G-d, would have created a world where *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom* would be right before our eyes, and the physical pleasures and blandishments would all be written about in the holy tomes, we would have certainly behaved much better!"

The Death of Evil

Obviously, G-d's desire was that we have the greater challenge of having to deal with the evil that is found in everything so that we could separate the good from the evil until the evil is banished forever in the days of Moshiach, when we will have the true and complete Redemption.

At that time, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's pleas to G-d will finally be heard, and the separation of good and evil will be complete.

Initially, though, in the Messianic Age, evil will still exist. However it will exist only as an

independent force that will not affect the good within us. Our vision will not be tarnished by evil and our good actions will be pure and unadulterated. However, while good is manifested in all of its glory, evil will be in the shadows. It will still exist as a reminder of what once tormented us and will still challenge the lowest classes of humanity who have done little to refine themselves before the Messianic Age. But, evil as we know it today, even in the initial stages of the Messianic Age will never be the same.

Subsequent to the "separation" of evil from good, evil will eventually disappear. Without the parasitic attachment of evil to the forces of goodness, evil will lose its major source of vitality and will ultimately cease to exist.

In the words of the prophet: "I shall remove the spirit of impurity from the earth." ( )

The Death of Death

We can now also explain why death and dying will also disappear in the Messianic Age, for death is tied in with the forces of evil. Although death has become part of the natural cycle of life, its purpose arose only

after evil was introduced into our existence. Death is part of the "winnowing" process that separates the evil from the good. It is what purifies the body and prepares it for the time of the Resurrection of the Dead, when the dead will come back to life. Once that occurs, evil will be vanquished forever and death will also cease to exist. In the words of the prophet: "Death will be swallowed up forever." ( )

ESSAY TWELVE

ADAM SAW TWO, NOT THREE

There are three focuses which lead us in the right direction:
G-d, us and the rest of the world.
To lead a wholesome life we cannot leave any item out of the equation.

ESSAY TWELVE

ADAM SAW TWO NOT THREE

The Enigma of Adam's Sin

One of the great Biblical enigmas is the way Adam and Eve partook of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge against the express command of G-d!

In the preceding essay two explanations were offered as to how Adam and Eve could have so miserably failed history's most crucial test. The first explanation is that pressure is commensurate with the importance of the test. Therefore, precisely because this was so crucial a matter, the pressure to succumb was likewise formidable. The second answer was based on the Midrashic premise that this sin was "orchestrated" by G-d to enable evil to become intermingled with good.

In this chapter we will cite and explain a third answer given in a collection of Midrashic literature, known as *Midrashei peliah* (anomalous or puzzling Midrashim). At first glance, these Midrashic comments make absolutely no sense. Only upon deeper

reflection does one see their true meaning. They are riddles designed to pique or intellectual curiosity so that we uncover profound lessons that might have otherwise been overlooked.

The Midrash states cryptically:

"Adam saw two and not three."

It seems that the Midrash is trying to answer the foregoing question, how it was that Adam was able to transgress so grievously? How could it be that Adam, who was given one Mitzvah, not to eat of the forbidden fruit, could not control himself?

The answer of the Midrash is that something fundamental was lacking in his vision: "he saw two and not three."

What is the Midrash referring to when it says "he saw two and not three?" What "two" and "three" is it alluding to?

Reflect on Three Things

One explanation offered by Rabbi Elijah of Vilna is that the statement "two and not three" is a reference to the first Mishnah (paragraph) in the third chapter of the

Talmudic tractate, *Pirkei Avos* (Ethics of the Fathers):

> "Reflect on **three** things and you will not come to sin. Know from where you came, and where you are going and before whom you will give an accounting. From where do you come? From a putrid drop. Where are you going? To a place of dust, worms and maggots. And before whom you will give an accounting? Before the supreme King of Kings, the Holy one blessed is He."

From this Mishnah it is clear that one must be able to reflect on all three things in order to be protected from sin. Hence, Adam who could not reflect on the fact that he came from a putrid drop—because Adam was not born but was formed from the earth by G-d Himself—did not have the mechanism to protect himself from sin.

The Difficulty

The foregoing ingenious interpretation, however, is problematic.

First of all, Adam had much more to reflect on than an ordinary person. Adam could have reflected that he was created by G-d Himself—he was *Yetzir kapov shel hadodosh baruch hu*, a direct creation of G-d, without the contribution of a mortal father or mother.

And if Adam needed a more sobering, down-to-earth meditation, he could have reflected on the fact that he was formed by G-d from dust of the earth. Indeed, this is the essence of the second meditation of the Mishnah: that we are going to a place of **dust** etc. Why couldn't he have reflected on the fact that he came from and was no more significant than dust of the earth?

Moreover, the Torah itself connects these two things: "You are dust and to dust you shall return."

If so, Adam did indeed have three things to reflect on. And his reflection should have been more powerful and effective than ours. Yet the Midrash contends that he only "saw two and not three." To which "two" and "three" is the Midrash referring?

Seeing Three and Not Just Two

One could offer another explanation of this puzzling Midrashic comment, by delving more deeply into the words of the aforementioned Mishnah. The Rebbe, in his commentary on Ethics of the Fathers, explains that the statement that we are to reflect on three things can actually be divided into three categories. The three things for one category might not be the same as for another.

The first category was directed to *tzadikkim*, the truly righteous and saintly individuals who have conquered their evil impulses. They no longer have to reflect on where they came from and where they are going etc. For them it suffices to simply reflect that there are three things in existence. These three things are: G-d, us and the world around us.

This means that when a person realizes that G-d put us here to change not only ourselves but also the world around us, and make it into a dwelling place for Him, a person will not even come close to sinning. For sinning is a product of one's loss of focus on why he or she is here. When a person is fully aware of

their life's mission, it is not likely they will even come close to sinning.

Perhaps, this can be likened to a pilot who knows that his destination is to fly eastward to Israel. Would it occur to him at any point to fly westward? Obviously not. Likewise a righteous person, one whose eyes are always on the ball, will never even entertain the notion to go in the opposite direction of his or her mission in life.

The second and third categories of people whose gaze is not always fixed on the goal, require more sobering reflections such as "from where do they come," etc. But for the more spiritually sophisticated human being, there is only a need to know that there are three things that matter, and that we are here to be the link between G-d and His world.

Based on this analysis of the meditation on the three things, we could say that the problem with Adam was that he only saw two of the three things. Adam was certainly aware of G-d's presence as he was of his own existence, but he was oblivious to the fact that there was a world around him that he had an obligation to affect.

Reaching for the Stars and Coming up Empty-handed

Rabbi Yonasan Eibushitz (one of the great eighteenth century Talmudic authorities and Kabbalists) provides a novel interpretation of Adam's indiscretion:

In his classic work *Ya'aros D'vash*, Rabbi Yonasan Eibushitz explains that Adam knew that his partaking of the forbidden fruit would end in his demise. But, Adam felt that only then—when his soul would no longer be encumbered by his body—that he would be able to achieve the pinnacle of spirituality.

According to Rabbi Yonatan Eibushitz, Adam wanted to give up his life so that he could reach the "fiftieth gate of understanding," the apex of spirituality.

This interpretation is consistent with the idea expressed earlier that Adam was two dimensional in his thought process. Adam was thus only interested in G-d and himself; that he would be able to reach the highest spiritual level. He forgot that G-d created him with a purpose to be in this world and to ultimately redeem it.

Three Dimensions and the Three Categories of People

People who seek only physical pleasure and instant gratification are one dimensional—all they think of is themselves; how to enhance their lives and pleasure.

People who seek to create a profound spiritual relationship with G-d are two dimensional because G-d is an integral and co-equal part of the equation. They are not just interested in their own existence.

And when one seeks to escape the lowly existence that is our world of materiality and temptation, though admirable in one sense, it is a sign that they have not reached the three-dimensional approach that is the hallmark of Judaism.

The Talmud emphasizes the role of the number three in the context of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. The Torah is divided into three, given by Moses who was the third child, in the third month, after three days of preparation etc.

Why the obsession with the number three?

In light of the above it is clear that the role of Torah is to connect G-d and his world

through our efforts in the observance of the Torah and its commandments—a point that eluded Adam.

Three and the Moshiach

The three-dimensional process of Torah—to make the world a G-dly world—is a gradual one. Each Mitzvah that we perform changes the world, one step at a time. The process will only be complete in the days of Moshiach.

Moshiach is identified by the combination of his close relationship with G-d and his ability to influence the whole world. This three dimensional approach that Adam was lacking will be the greatest strength of Moshiach. The exquisite balance between the three elements of G-d, the person and the world that Moshiach possesses will rectify the gap in Adam's record who "saw two but not three."

The very name Adam is said to be an acrostic for: **A**dam, **D**avid and Moshiach. Moshiach's mission will be to rectify that which Adam damaged.

The Three Holy Temples

The number three also relates to one of the salient characteristics of the Messianic Age; the building of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. This will be the third Temple, as the first two were destroyed by the Babylonians and Romans respectively.

The first Temple was known for the dramatic display of G-dly light. It highlighted the G-dly dimension.

The second Temple was known for its physical beauty and majesty. It highlighted the worldly dimension.

The third Temple will combine the qualities of the first two. It will link the majesty of G-d within the parameters of the world. Thus it can be said that the third Temple will be the ultimate structure that exemplifies the three-dimensional character of the Messianic Age because it will highlight the qualities of the first two and also serve as the link between them.

The First Temple with its heightened display of G-dly light corresponds to the first aspect that we must reflect on: G-d.

The Second Temple, which was closer to the level of the people, corresponded to the

second element that we must reflect on: ourselves.

The Third Temple, besides combining these two qualities, will also have its influence and light spread to the entire world; the third element on which we must reflect.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

APPLE AND EVE?

A beautiful person is one who thinks out of the box, is consistent and for who the means are just as important as the end.

This person lives a rich and full life every moment.

This is the Esrog-Beautiful-fruit personality.

ESSAY ELEVEN

APPLE AND EVE?

The Apple Myth

What kind of fruit did Adam and Eve partake of? The Torah does not mention explicitly what tree it was from.

Most people are under the impression that it was an apple. The poor apple has been maligned for centuries as the fruit that brought misfortune to the world.

Actually, our sages of the Talmud and Midrash disagree about the identity of this "mystery" fruit. There are, in fact, four opinions recorded; but none of them mention the apple.

One Talmudic Sage states it was a fig tree (Berachos) A second opinion maintains that it was a grapevine. A third view insists that it was a kernel of wheat (The Talmud asks: "Does wheat grow on a tree?") Yet, another Sage in the Midrash contends that it was an *Esrog* (the lemon-like fruit that we bless on the Holiday of *Sukkot*).

No one, however, suggested that it might have been an apple. Where did the notion that it was an apple derive from?

The Kernel of Truth

Every myth has a kernel of truth in it. Likewise it has been suggested that the myth that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge was an apple is based on a passage in the Talmud (Shabbos) concerning the way the Jewish people accepted the Torah at Mount Sinai. Instead of asking to know what the Torah was all about before accepting it, the Jewish people said, "*Na'aseh v'nihsma*-We will do (accept) it and we will (then) hear (what it is all about)."

This approach, the Talmud likens to an apple tree, which produces its fruit before its leaves. This unconventional reversal of the normal way trees bear fruit, the Talmud explains, is illustrative of the unconventional order the Jews followed in accepting the Torah: to accept something before knowing what it is.

The *Tosphos* commentary (a collection of Talmudic research of the eleventh -

fourteenth century of French and German rabbis, printed in every edition of the Talmud alongside Rashi's running commentary) raises the obvious question: In fact, an apple tree is no different from any other tree that first grows its leaves and then its fruit!

The *Tosphos* commentary answers that the Talmud is not referring to an apple but to the *Esrog*, which is also named *tapuach* (Hebrew for apple. The word *tapuach* is cognate to the word that means "blown up or rotund, the shape of both an apple and a full grown Esrog).

An *Esrog*, which grows in all four seasons, can bear a fruit while next season's leaves have not yet appeared.

Thus, we see that in Talmudic jargon an *Esrog* is also represented by the word *tapuach*, the word we normally translate as an apple.

The Unconventional *Esrog*

Of what significance is it that the forbidden fruit they partook of was an *Esrog*?

While an Esrog is a citrus fruit resembling a lemon, it possesses three unconventional characteristics:

a) The leaves appear after the fruit because: b) it thrives in all four seasons, c) the *Esrog* tree has the same taste as its fruit.

As stated, an *Esrog*'s growth is unconventional and reflects the unconventional fashion in which the Jews accepted the Torah.

The reason Adam and Eve failed their first test was precisely because they based their adherence to the commandment on their own understanding of it. They reasoned that the pros of eating the fruit would outweigh the cons. Rationally, that is a valid way of living. But, when it comes to G-d's commandments, we must follow the example of the *Esrog*, to first commit ourselves totally to G-d's will and then employ reason to better appreciate what we are doing.

For All Seasons and Moods

The *Esrog* also possesses another unique characteristic. The Talmud states (as

mentioned above) that an *Esrog* thrives in all seasons. The symbolism is clear.

Our principles of Judaism are as applicable in one season as they are in another. The term "season" can be understood in a broader sense that it refers to the different moods we go through. There are times that we are naturally more receptive to certain modes of behavior, while in other times we lose interest and motivation to do the right thing. The serpent presumably tried to entice Adam and Eve at a time that he felt they were most vulnerable.

Had Adam an Eve paid attention to the nature of the *Esrog* tree that it thrives equally in all seasons—that its faithfulness does not waver and does not change with the changes of moods—they would not have succumbed.

The End does Not Justify the Means

A third characteristic that is unique to the *Esrog* is that the bark of the tree has the same taste as the fruit itself.

On one level the lesson here complements the preceding lesson of the *Esrog* thriving in

all seasons. As stated, that is an expression of consistency, of ultimate truth and an indication of true loyalty.

Truth is also measured by the degree the means and the end match. When one compromises on the means to reach a valid end, it is incompatible with the ideal of *emes*, which is truth and consistency.

Had Adam and Eve understood this lesson he would have realized that no matter how high he could have soared by eating the forbidden fruit, no matter how many new dimensions of knowledge would have been opened for him, it did not justify the means—there was no justification to partake of the fruit G-d forbade him to eat.

Eating the Trees

This thought can shed light on the Midrashic explanation of the way G-d created the trees. Initially G-d commanded that the trees bear fruit, wherein both the bark of the tree and the fruit have the same taste. The fruit "disobeyed" G-d's command and bore fruit with taste, but disregarded the order that the tree share that taste.

What exactly do our Sages mean when they say that the trees disobeyed? And what does it tell us?

In light of the above characterization of the *Esrog* as one of the only plants where the bark has the same taste as the fruit we can shed light on the statement that the tree disobeyed G-d's command.

G-d wants a perfectly consistent world. But, G-d wants **us** to make it consistent. In order to achieve that goal, G-d informs us of His ultimate desire, and then proceeds to show us how He "sabotaged" His own plan. This He does, deliberately, so that we can correct it.

When Adam saw the *Esrog* and contrasted it with other trees he should have understood that it was meant as a challenge to him. On the one hand he knew that trees do not taste like their fruits, but the *Esrog* tree stood out and did taste like the fruit. This anomaly should have reminded him of his role in this world to perfect it with the consistent adherence to the proper values. He should have realized that G-d wanted him to make all of the world as consistent as the *Esrog* tree. By violating this law, Adam failed to learn the lesson of the *Esrog.*

The Correction

Our sages state that the experience of Sinai was intended to remedy the effects of Adam and Eve's transgression. It was thus the role of the Jewish people at Mount Sinai to correct the indiscretion of Adam and Eve by heeding the message of the *Esrog*, to make their commitment to G-d come before their understanding, make the commitment for all seasons and circumstances, as well as to make sure that the means and the end are good and righteous s.

Sinai marked the beginning of the process of reversal. It was the time when the reversing of the reversal of Adam and Eve was to commence.

The Whole World will be One Big *Esrog*

The Messianic Age is when the world will finally realize the completion of this process. At that time, the entire world will follow the example of the *Esrog*. The very nature of the world will have its will conform to the Divine will. No longer will we have to struggle with our intellect and our need to accept G-d's commands.

With this new awareness of G-d that will pervade the world, goodness and holiness will be a perpetual experience. Judaism with thrive in all of our seasons and moods. Judaism will be appreciated not just in spite of the different aspects of our personality, but the different shades and colors of our personality will each reflect the beauty of Torah in multifaceted ways.

Needless to say, in the Messianic Age, there will be no discrepancy between the "bark" and the "fruit," between the means and the end, because every aspect of our life will be *hadar*, which means beautiful—the Biblical name for the *Esrog.*

ESSAY FOURTEEN

THE FIG LEAF

The power to fight evil is contained within the evil itself.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

THE FIG LEAF

Tree of Knowledge

Contrary to the popular myth, the Tree of Knowledge was not an apple tree (see preceding essay), which raises the question, what kind of a tree was it?

The Talmud and Midrash register four opinions concerning the identity of this mysterious tree. The fact that the Talmud finds this matter important enough to discuss suggests that there is—and we must find—a moral in the identity of the tree. And there are four different lessons we can derive from this tree that correspond with the four opinions as to its precise identification.

The Fig

In this essay we will explore one of the four opinions, the one that says it was the fig tree.

Evidence of this interpretation is adduced from the passage in the Torah that follows Adam and Eve's indiscretion. The Torah

relates that they used the fig leaf to cover their nakedness. The Midrash observes that when Adam and Eve realized that they were naked and tried to use the leaves of other trees to cover themselves, the leaves "refused" to be used by them. Only the fig tree did not resist. This, the Midrash argues is an indication that the fig tree was an accomplice in the crime. It could therefore not turn down Adam and Eve's efforts to use its leaves as did the other trees.

Why the Mystery?

Before we discuss the moral lesson that we can learn from the opinion that says the forbidden fruit was a fig, there is a preliminary question that we must deal with:

Rashi asks, if the fruit was a fig, why doesn't the Torah say that at the outset? Why does it wait for us to use our detective skills to deduce that it was a fig?

Rashi answers that the Torah did not want to malign the fig, lest people would think of it as an evil fruit and reject it.

However, this answer just begs another question. If the Torah did not want to

identify the fruit, why does the Talmud go through this exercise in trying to prove that it was a fig? Is the Talmud not causing us to disparage the poor fig?

The answer to this question lies in the way the identification is made by the Torah. If we were to discover from the very outset that the forbidden fruit that led to the downfall of man was a fig, we would identify the fig as a source of evil, which is not true. The fig was not evil; Adam and Eve's partaking of it was.

But now that the identification of the tree as a fig tree is made in the part of the narrative that shows how the fig tree actually helped Adam and Eve recover and begin the process of rehabilitation from their sin, we will no longer think of it as evil. Indeed, the fig tree was the first being to assist man.

In the English language the term fig-leaf acquired a rather negative connotation, as a form of cover-up intended to hide one's true negative character. In the words of the dictionary: "something intended to conceal what may be considered indecorous or indecent: to approach the facts of life with the fig leaves of roundabout expressions."

The Good Fig Leaf

There is, however, a positive lesson to be derived from the use of the fig-leaf. If the fig tree was the culprit then it follows that the means for correcting what they had done wrong also had to be a fig-leaf. And, indeed, it served as the first thing that they did to deal with the consequences of their transgression.

From this we can see that the fig tree was not evil. It was actually was, in the annals of history, the very first instrument to bring about correction.

It is not surprising to find that the fig is one of the seven fruits for which the Land of Israel is praised. On the New Year for Trees, many have a custom to eat figs among other fruits. Nowhere in Jewish tradition is this fruit maligned.

"From the bitter comes the sweet."

There is also another deeper and more powerful lesson inherent in the narrative of the fig leaf and the identification of the fig as the forbidden fruit. The seeds of reconstruction are found in the process and

instruments of destruction. "From the bitter comes the sweet."

This concept is an integral part of the Hebrew language. By simply rearranging the letters of certain Hebrew words that have negative connotations the word will acquire a positive meaning; indeed, the very opposite of the negative word.

For example: The word *nega*, (perhaps even the origin of the word "negative") which means plague (and, according to Sefer Yetizrah there is nothing lower then *nega)*, when rearranged, forms the word *oneg* that means delight (and according to Sefer Yetizrah, there is nothing higher than *oneg)*.

Another example: The word falsehood is *sheker* in Hebrew. All one has to do is rearrange the letters and it becomes *kesher*, that means a permanent bond, the very opposite of falsehood which is understood as something that cannot endure.

In practical terms this suggests that when a person does something wrong, there is no reason to despair. One can always correct their mistakes, and that the means to correcting it is close at hand; in fact, all one has to do is look more deeply into the

dynamics of the evil act, make a few adjustments, and one will be on the way to one's rehabilitation.

More specifically this lesson can be applied as follows: When we sin, we must realize that we can learn the lessons how to change from the way we strayed. If we sin as a result of temptation and burning desire for something forbidden, the way to correct that its to use the passion and energy for something positive.

If we acted rebelliously, we should use our feisty nature to defy the conventions of society that want everyone to conform.

The same can be applied to virtually every vice. The cure lies in the illness.

Golah and Geulah

What has been said in relation to good and evil, that one could find the way out of evil into the realm of goodness from looking deeper into the dynamics of evil is also true about the relationship between exile-*Golah* and the future Redemption-*Geulah*.

Conventional wisdom has us believe that exile is all negative and the Redemption entails the complete severance of our ties with exile. To be liberated from slavery is to repudiate it.

In truth, in Kabbalah we are told that exile is not all evil. In fact, embedded within the framework of exile are powerful spiritual energies. But these energies are thoroughly concealed. Redemption means that we will be able to access these energies, because their cover will be removed.

This, the Alter Rebbe (R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of the Chabad Chassidic movement and author of the classic work Tanya) explains why the two words in Hebrew for exile and Redemption are virtually identical. *Golah* and *Geulah,* exile and Redemption respectively, share the same letters, with but one slight addition in the word *Geulah*, which also has the letter *aleph.*

The key to Redemption is to unlock the mystery of exile. In the Messianic Age we will be able to look back and see the dynamic energy that exists presently in exile. Once we recognize that dynamic we can benefit from it.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

SWEET GRAPES

Life is about making or missing opportunities.

Even when doing something wrong, we should be bothered most by what we did not do right.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

SWEET GRAPES

Tree of Knowledge: a Grapevine

Among the four opinions as to what tree Adam and Eve ate from (see preceding essays), there is one that it was a grapevine. The basis for this opinion is that that particular fruit, i.e., its primary by product, wine, has been implicated in many a misfortune throughout history. Several of the calamities brought on by wine are recorded in the Torah. Noah and Lot are just two examples where drinking excessively have ended in disaster.

The Midrash states, however, that if Adam and Eve would have waited just three hours until the onset of the Sabbath, they would have been permitted to drink the wine. Adam would have recited the first Kiddush on wine. Because he could not wait until it would be permissible, his action brought death and misfortune to the world that will last until after the coming of Moshiach.

The obvious lesson from this opinion is that "haste makes waste." The very same act when done prematurely or at an inappropriate time can have the opposite effect as compared to the same act when performed at the appropriate time. In the words of King Solomon the wisest of all men, "For everything there is an appropriate time."

Why does one have to be a King Solomon to figure that out? Isn't it obvious that a winter coat in the summer is out of place? Isn't it obvious that an immature child could not and should not be allowed to do certain good deeds that can jeopardize its life?

Missed Opportunities

The simple understanding of King Solomon's words is that he was counseling patience; one should not do the things for which one is not ready. In effect, King Solomon was actually telling us what we should not do.

Upon further analysis it may be suggested that, on the contrary, King Solomon's message is positive not negative. Rather than counseling what not to do, His exhortation to us was that we **should do** the things at the

right time and that we should utilize the time we must wait to prepare ourselves get ready for the time that we will be ready.

Adam and Eve's sin was not that they did what they were not yet permitted to do, but it was that as a result of their premature imbibing, they precluded themselves from drinking the wine of the Tree of Knowledge at the appointed time. It's not what they did wrong as much as what they did not do right.

Restrictive Statements

Jewish literature is replete with restrictive statements about learning the secrets of Torah, the esoteric knowledge of Kabbalah that is also referred to as the "wine" of Torah. As the Talmud states: "When wine enters, out come the secrets." When the masters of Kabbalah would teach this secret knowledge they limited the number and caliber of people who were permitted to attend their session. Most of the Talmudic Sages were not initiates into this hidden discipline.

One might get the impression that like the wine drunk prematurely by Adam and Eve,

the study of the esoteric dimension of Torah is a negative.

In light of our analysis, however, the opposite is true. While there were certainly restrictions imposed on the study of this arcane discipline, the ultimate goal was that it does become widespread.

The Zohar—which was taught, initially, and for many centuries later, to only a select few—clearly states that a time will come when even children will be privy to the secrets of the Zohar. The Zohar further states that when these teachings will be disseminated, they will actually be the catalyst to bring Moshiach. What was out of bounds in the past has become an imperative.

Waiting for Moshiach

Similarly, there were many periods in Jewish history when Jewish leaders were wary of Messianic fervor that was generated by obvious imposters or those who were suspect.

As a result, there were those who felt that all talk of Moshiach was detrimental. Talk of

Moshiach was considered by some to be dangerous and premature.

There can be nothing further from the truth. Belief in Moshiach is one of the Thirteen Principles of Faith. And integral to this belief is the requirement to anxiously await his coming. All of classical Jewish literature—the Bible, Talmud, Kabbalah etc.—is replete with references to Moshiach.

Moreover, Moshiach and related beliefs (rebuilding of Holy Temple, Resurrection of the Dead etc.) represent the most pervasive theme in our daily prayers. In the course of one year, there are about 20,000 references to Moshiach and Redemption in our prayers!

Indeed, much of Jewish tradition is geared to being prepared for the future Redemption.

We must thus realize that admonitions to the contrary were merely intended as a way of protecting the people from charlatans so that they can properly prepare for the real Moshiach. But, at no time did we dismiss the need to await and prepare for Moshiach.

And as time progresses the anticipation for Moshiach must increase. If there were statements made by our Sages that intimated

some caution this is something that must change with the passage of time.

A Stop Sign or a Red Light?

Whenever there is a roadblock that was put up to prevent the commencement of a new and higher level of spirituality, one must reflect whether the restriction is a stop sign or a red light. The difference is that when one stops at a red light they may not proceed until it turns green. A stop sign, by contrast, is a sign to stop, look in every direction, but then proceed.

Moreover, even a red light cannot remain that way indefinitely. When we stop at the light we have to be vigilant, waiting for it to turn green at a moment's notice.

The lesson from Adam and Eve partaking from the grapevine prematurely is not about haste and doing things at the inappropriate time. The lesson is about how we should prepare ourselves for the real thing.

The Zohar's prediction was echoed 1400 years later by the Ari, who emphasized the need to start reveal and popularizing this mystical tradition.

With the advent of the Chassidic movement, the esoteric teachings have been disseminated throughout the world. What was once forbidden has no become the most powerful spiritual medium that has inspired countless Jews and has paved the way for the coming of Moshiach.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE FOUR KINDS

Torah comes in four dimensions known as Pardes, a delightful orchard.

While we must know when and how to approach indulge, we must be prepared to master all of them.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE FOUR KINDS

The Four Opinions

The Rabbis of the Talmud disagree as to the identity of the fruit Adam and Eve partook of.

> "The tree from which Adam ate from:
>
> "Rabbi Meir says was a grapevine. For there is nothing that brings wailing upon man as wine, as it is stated: 'And he drank from the wine and became drunk.'
>
> "Rabbi Nechemyah says it was a fig tree. For through the very thing that caused them degradation corrected them, as it is stated, 'and they sewed together fig leaves.'
>
> Rabbi Yehudah says it was a wheat stalk, for an infant does not know how to say 'father' or 'mother' until he tastes the taste of grain.

The Midrash records a fourth opinion that it was an Esrog, the fruit that we take and

make a blessing over during the Holiday of Sukkot. (See preceding essays.)

The Connection of Fruits to Knowledge

Since the forbidden tree is called the Tree of Knowledge, it stands to reason that all of the four fruits have some connection with knowledge. Yet, only the opinion that says that it was a wheat stalk makes a connection to knowledge.

It may be suggested that the four opinions correspond to the four levels of knowledge in which the Torah is divided: *Pardes*.

Pardes: The Orchard of Torah

The Torah can be understood on four general levels. These four levels are known as *p'shat, remez, d'rush* and *sod*, the initials of which form the Hebrew word *pardes*, which means an orchard.

P'shat is the simple and straightforward level of understanding a text. The word *P'shat* is related to the word *pashut*-simple and spread-out, meaning that this level can be understood by everyone.

Remez represents the allusions a word or verse may have to another concept. Often the hints embedded in a word are connected to the words numerical value (gematria) or the letters of the word may form the initials of an entire sentence (as we just did to the word *pardes*).

This level, while not the obvious meaning of the text, is more accessible than the next two levels. Even a simple person can relate to the way words can allude to other ideas. In fact, this approach is very popular because it adds spice to the text.

D'rush is the process of investigating beneath the surface of a word or idea; where deeper meanings and messages are derived from the text.

When we study a text and discover an anomaly, such as a repetitive phrase, or an apparent contradiction, it forces us to probe deeper into the text to discover a deeper meaning; one that is instructive and edifying.

Sod represents the mystical or esoteric dimension of the Torah, where words and verses contain allusions to mystical concepts.

The esoteric level deals with G-dly attributes, spiritual worlds, angels and other spiritual concepts.

Wheat and the Simple Level of Torah Interpretation

We can now attempt to show the correlation between these four levels of interpretation and the four opinions as to what fruit Adam and Eve partook.

Wheat the Talmud identifies with the most basic understanding that an infant has.

Wheat, from which bread is made, is the basic staple of life. It represents the straightforward and basic understanding of the Torah. Whatever else we do with a text, the Talmud declares: "No verse can be taken out of its simple meaning." This does not preclude interpreting the text on other levels; it just negates ignoring the level of *p'shat*. While we can "survive" without the other levels of understanding, we cannot subsist without the "wheat" of Torah—*p'shat.*

Esrog and the Allusive Approach to Torah

The *Esrog* can be correlated to the allusive level of interpretation known as *remez*.

In Biblical language, an *Esrog* is called *Hadar*, beautiful. There is something very beautiful about the *Esrog*, its taste and aroma and appearance. This correlates to the level of *remez*, which is appealing to people; there is a certain elegance to the approach of *remez*, that makes it appealing to all levels of society. It spices our understanding of the text.

In addition, one of the distinctive features of the *Esrog*, the Talmud states, is that its tree has the same taste as the fruit.

This can also be an allusion to *remez*, where the "tree" (i.e., the words and letters themselves on which the meaning hangs) and the "fruit" (i.e., the allusive message) are the same. In other words, the message is reflected in the most intricate details of the word.

This is in contrast with the other three levels of interpretation:

In the level of *p'shat* the meaning ("fruit") is reflected in the word ("tree") in the most general way. It has nothing to do with the letters, and other details of the word.

In the level of *d'rush*, only the inside (i.e., the meaning and messages) is visible it does not fit snugly into the words themselves. In *d'rush* there is a leap from the words (the "tree") to the interpretation (the "fruit" that hangs on the "tree").

In *sod*, the connection between the words (i.e., the "tree") and the mystical concepts (i.e., the "fruit") is more tenuous. The gap between the words and the interpretation is even more remote. While an astute scholar can look at a text and figure out the meaning on the level of *remez* or *d'rush*, it is impossible to independently anticipate the level of *sod*.

A third connection of *Esrog* to *remez* is the saying in *Pirkei Avos* (Ethics of the Fathers) that *gematria* (numerology, one of the aspects of *remez*) is a "condiment to wisdom." An *Esrog* is not a staple of one's diet; it is a condiment.

Thus, the *Esrog* is most illustrative of the level of *remez*.

A Fig and the Level of *Derush*

The fig is a fruit that is nourishing. Although wheat nourishes more than a fig, the fig has the distinction that it is more tasty and enjoyable than bread. Fruits were generally used as deserts. This therefore alludes to *d'rush* that nourishes the person and provides intellectual enjoyment simultaneously. Unlike *p'shat*, which can be dry and uninspiring, *d'rush* is exciting and stimulating, even as it provides us with vital lessons that are needed for our spiritual well-being.

The fig is a unique fruit in that it has no waste. There is no peel to discard and not pit that is inedible. The fruit in its entirety is consumed. This is just like *d'rush* where there is no part of it that is elusive and esoteric as in sod that cannot be "eaten."

It is also not like *p'shat* where one senses there is something more to the text, and leaves us wanting more, but we have no access to that deeper meaning.

Likewise *remez*, while it is accessible and enjoyable it is almost as if we are being teased because we are convinced there is more to the text than just that hint.

Certainly, when it comes to sod, even the greatest kabbalists will readily admit that there is more to the subject than he can possibly comprehend.

A Grape and the Level of Sod

A grape is associated with wine and wine is associated with the secrets of the Torah- hence the esoteric dimension of Torah.

There is actually a twofold connection of the grape to the level of sod.

First, as mentioned, the Talmud states: "When the wine enters, the secrets emerge." The Talmud states further that the numerical value of the Hebrew word for wine is the same as the word *sod*.

Second, the actual process in wine production is not just squeezing the grapes as we would an orange to produce orange juice. Part of the process involves allowing the juice embedded in the grape to come out. Some of the juice is "concealed" within the grape just as the mystical teachings are concealed within the text of the Torah.

The Four Lessons

If the above correlation between the four opinions as to which fruit Adam partook of and the four levels of interpretation is valid, the question that can be posed now is what was wrong with these fruits that Adam was commanded not to eat them? What can be wrong with these four levels of interpretation?

The general lesson about the Tree of Knowledge is that there can be danger in wisdom. When a person places his intellect above all else, one can degenerate into a lowly being. Witness the German nation's advanced intellectual achievements and their behavior. Intellect must be preceded by submission to values that emanate from a Higher authority.

The specific lesson from the opinion that says it was wheat, is that there are some who limit their understanding of Torah to the most obvious layer of meaning, ignoring the deeper underlying meanings represented by *remez, d'rush* and *sod. p'shat*, as important as it is, must be augmented by the deeper layers of understanding that invest life and spirit into the *p'shat.*

Nachmanides writes that one can be a despicable human being with permission of the Torah. This means that if one takes the *p'shat* of Torah, and follows its dictates to the letter, but does not have any insight into the underlying dimension, they could still remain at the lowest level of humanity.

To be sure, one must begin with and never deviate one iota from the *p'shat*, the basic level of Torah, but one must go beyond that and access the soul of Judaism. And only then can we transform ourselves.

The lesson from the opinion that says that the knowledge he sought was the level of *remez* is that *remez* takes word that applies to a specific situation and interprets it as an allusion to a completely different situation. The danger inherent in having just a *remez* orientation is that people forget about the here and now in their pursuit of hints to the future.

An example of this is Korach the man who rebelled against Moses. According to the Midrash and Chassidic thought, Korach was misled by his vision of the future. While he was prescient, he lost sight of the *p'shat*, the

simple reality of that moment that he was rebelling against Moses.

The lesson we can derive from the Tree of Knowledge identification with *d'rush* is that the person who uses deductive reasoning to discover an underlying concept can fall into a trap. Deductive reasoning can be dangerous when not protected by safeguards. The Talmud relates that there were certain brilliant scholars who can provide 150 logical arguments to show that a dead rodent is ritually pure, despite the fact that the Torah explicitly declares it to be ritually unclean.

If there is danger in the glorification of knowledge it is primarily in the area where one's mental acuity is displayed.

The danger in *sod* is well documented throughout history. People who dabbled in the mystical teachings of Kabbalah without the proper preparation would suffer horrible consequences.

The Talmud relates the famous story of the four great sages who entered the "*pardes*-orchard" (read: the mystical knowledge). One died, one became deranged, one became a heretic and only one (Rabbi Akiva), "entered in peace and left in peace."

Adam and Eve clearly were not prepared for the excursion into the mysteries of the Torah and suffered negative consequences.

This insight might explain the Talmud's statement that Adam when shown a vision of the future grieved for Rabbi Akiva death.

Why, of all people who suffered martyrdom did he grieve just for Rabbi Akiva?

Perhaps Adam's empathy for Rabbi Akiva lies in the fact that he rectified that which Adam failed to accomplish—the safe entry into and emergence from the "orchard."

The Rectification

The disastrous results of the sin of the Tree of Knowledge will finally be rectified in the Messianic Age.

The four problems associated with this Tree (i.e., having only the superficial level of understanding, having only the projected meaning but not seeing that which is in front of us, glorification of human reasoning and being ill-equipped and ill-prepared for the esoteric knowledge) will all be corrected.

This means that in the Messianic Age, all four levels will be complete.

We will not have a bifurcated Torah. But all the four levels will be mastered in a fully integrated way.

Our intellectual capacities (which drive us to the level of *d'rush*) and our penchant to look for tantalizing allusions (associated with *remez)* will be checked by our soul's spiritual connection to G-d that will result from our exposure to the mystical dimension of Torah (the level of *sod*).

We will be fully prepared for that level, unlike Adam and others, because these mystical teachings have already been revealed to us in the last few centuries through the popularization of these teachings, through the Chassidic Masters. By studying these teachings we get a good taste and sampling of the future mysteries of Torah.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

PERFECTION[4]

We are conditioned to believe in imperfection.

That is true for one who lives with an exile mindset.

In the liberated world of the future we will enjoy: perfect faith, Torah, healing, and Redemption.

The initials of these four entities form the word Esrog—the perfect fruit.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

PERFECTION[4]

Esrog: The Perfect Fruit

According to the Midrash, the Tree of Knowledge was an *Esrog* tree, from which we take the *Esrog,* the fruit we use on the Holiday of Sukkot. This tree/fruit is also known to us by another name, the one used in the Torah: "*pri eitz hadar*-the fruit of a beautiful (or: goodly) tree."

The definition of *hadar* is something that is beautiful or goodly because it is unblemished, something that is perfect.

It has been suggested that the word *Esrog*, is an acronym for four Hebrew words: *Emunah* (faith), Torah, *Refuah* (recovery from illness) and *Geulah* (Redemption). The one theme that unites these four apparently disparate concepts is that they are all frequently followed by the word "*shleimah*," which means complete or perfect.

An Esrog personality is one who embodies the four values of faith, Torah, healing and redemption in their perfected state.

Adam was Too Perfect

Commentators point out that the word Esrog is also an acronym for the four words that appear in the Psalms (36:12): "*Al t'voeini regel Ga'avah*-Do not lead me to the feet of conceit." Because the *Esrog* represents the four aforementioned values in their most ideal form, the danger of pride, arrogance and conceit for the person who is an *Esrog* becomes a distinct possibility.

The perfect fruit and individual has to therefore be reminded that one is wholly imperfect if they think they have achieved perfection.

Adam was the most perfect human specimen. Shaped by G-d Himself, endowed with the highest soul. The Sages of Kabbalah assert that Adam's soul (not his prophecy or piety) was higher than that of Moses. Adam's sensing his own singular importance was vulnerable; and that is what brought him to sin.

Thus we find that in the Biblical book of Chronicles, then name Adam is written with an enlarged letter aleph, to indicate the way he viewed himself—larger than life perfect. By contrast, when G-d's speaks to Moses and shows him the high regard in which he was held by G-d, a miniature size *aleph* is used. Moses, with all of his unparalleled qualities was exceedingly humble.

Perfect Faith

In this essay, we will focus on each of these four concepts and how they can exist on two planes: the imperfect and the perfect.

Faith is the foundation of Judaism. Without it, one can theoretically observe all the commandments, but it will not endure.

But there is faith and there is faith.

When a Jew was willing to die rather than pay mere lip-service to someone who tried to get the Jew to profess belief in another religion; that was an expression of perfect faith.

When Jews, on their way to the gas chambers, sung the words "*Ani ma'amin b'emunah shleimah b'vias haMoshiach*-I

believe with perfect faith in the coming of Moshiach"—that was perfect faith!

Perfect faith is not shaken during difficult times and is not suppressed in affluent times.

Deep down, we all have this perfect faith, but there are times that it is covered by layers of intellectualism, obsession with material matters, collapsing under the weight of difficult times etc. But when we are jolted by certain events—incredibly painful or good—we awaken that pure, unadulterated and perfect faith

Perfect Torah

Torah is Divine wisdom. In His infinite kindness, G-d gave us the ability to study Torah and thereby breach the gap between the finite created mind and infinite mind of the Creator.

But because Torah can be, and must be, subjected to rigorous study, the student of Torah might forget its Divine character.

"Perfect Torah" means, first and foremost, that we appreciate the Divine character of Torah and we do not strip the Torah of its true source and nature. To view the Torah as

a beautiful piece of literature or a brilliant system of logic is to embrace a compromised and truly imperfect Torah.

A corollary of this understanding of a "Perfect Torah" is that Torah, like its Divine Author, is endless. There is no limit to its depth and scope, and is therefore impossible to fathom. To think that we have plumbed the depths of Torah and reached its deepest point is to deny the "Perfect Torah" ideal.

A third connotation of a "perfect Torah" is the belief and understanding that all parts of Torah are equally Divine. As Maimonides points out, if anyone denies the authenticity of even one verse of the Torah, or one teaching of the Oral tradition, it is as if they denied the entire Torah.

Torah exists on various planes. Generally speaking, this means that we realize that the Torah is a composite of a body and a soul. The body is the legal aspect of Torah, and the soul of Torah is the spiritual and mystical teachings that were passed down through the masters of Kabbalah and Chassidus.

When one accepts and studies both dimensions of Torah, their approach is one of

"Perfect Torah," a wholly integrated and complete Torah.

Perfect Healing

When Jews wish others a speedy recovery they usually phrase it as a "*refuah shleimah*-a complete or perfect recovery."

Healing can also be applied to spiritual matters. When the prophet speaks of how G-d will forgive us he frequently employs the metaphor of healing. In fact, according to the teachings of Kabbalah it is the reverse. Everything physical originates in the spiritual realms. From there they "devolve" into the physical realm. Here too, the idea of healing is patently a spiritual phenomenon, from which the idea of physical healing emerged.

And this is where the idea of a "perfect Healing" comes into the discussion. If a person heals only the physical manifestations of a spiritual malady, they are only experiencing a partial healing. Only when the soul goes through its own healing process can a person be said to enjoy a complete recovery.

On another level, the idea of spiritual illness is relative. Chassidic thought defines spiritual sickness in terms of a person who has achieved the penultimate level of G-dly perception, but finds the highest level elusive. This is extremely painful to the most spiritually sensitive individuals, far more than the person who has just begun his spiritual journey and realizes how much more there is to go.

The Talmud states that there are fifty gates of G-dly understanding and we can humanly only reach the forty-ninth gate. When a person reaches the forty-ninth level they will experience unbearable anguish at not being able to transcend to apprehend the fiftieth level.

It is interesting that the very word for a sick person in Hebrew is *choleh.* The numerical value of this word is forty nine. The definition of illness in its most spiritual form—from which all other forms emerge—is thus one who has the highest G-dly understanding but has not reached the top.

A *refuah shleimah*-Perfect Healing in the ultimate sense applies only to one who has

achieved this fiftieth level, which can only occur in the Messianic Era.

As long as we are in exile, our ability to achieve complete healing is inherently limited. This translates in the inability for us to find the cures to all illnesses.

The fact that we see new technologies, at least theoretically, that can cure virtually any disease, is an indication that we are so close to the time when we will attain the fiftieth level, complete recovery, with the imminent coming of Moshiach and the Age of Redemption.

Perfect Redemption

Throughout the long and arduous journey through history the Jewish people experienced various forms of liberation. But, every period of liberation was followed by another exile.

According to the teachings of Chassidus, from the day we left Egypt, we haven't completely left Egypt, and every day we have to re-experience the Exodus.

Moreover, even when we were free, there were always areas of life that impinged on

our freedom. Either we were subjected to incessant attacks by our neighbors, or torn asunder by civil strife, with the exception of the brief reign of King Solomon, the Jewish people never experience complete and perfect freedom.

The future Redemption that will be ushered in by Moshiach is when we will finally go out of "Egypt" permanently.

All the Perfections Related

The *Esrog*, whose acronym is Faith, Torah, Healing and Redemption, is the combination of all four areas of perfection.

When Moshiach will bring about the final and complete Redemption, it will bring complete healing—both physical and spiritual—to the entire world. Not only will we reach the fiftieth, most transcendent level of G-dly awareness, but it will also translate in a world devoid of illness.

How will this process unfold?

According to Maimonides and Chassidic thought, Moshiach's ultimate objective is to reveal all the deepest dimensions of Torah to all. Moshiach will remove all the impediments

and distractions to Torah study and make the Torah's intrinsic perfection manifest to all.

Once Torah will be revealed in all of its glory, and its perfection will be manifest, the world will experience full recovery and liberation.

But all of this begins with perfect faith in the coming of Moshiach and the other principles of faith, as our Sages declare that it is in the merit of faith that we were liberated from Egypt. And so too will we be liberated from this exile and experience perfection through perfect faith.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE: HAMAN'S TREE

Knowledge is not inherently evil.

What's evil is the glorification of knowledge above G-d and G-dly behavior.

When knowledge is used to rationalize evil it too becomes sullied.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE: HAMAN'S TREE

Where is Haman Mentioned in the Torah?

When Adam and Eve were confronted by G-d for having eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, the expression G-d used was: "Have you eaten of the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?"

The Hebrew word that translates into "Have [you eaten] of" is "*hamin.*" When written without vowels—as is the case with any kosher Torah scroll—the word "*hamin*" is written precisely the same as the word Haman, the wicked Persian Prime Minister whose plot to annihilate all the Jews and his eventual downfall and salvation for the Jews gave us the joyous holiday of Purim.

The connection to Haman can be extended. The juxtaposition of the word *hamin* (read: Haman) to the word "tree" portended the way Haman would eventually hang on the tree on which he planned to hang Mordechai.

Now, one might think that the association between Adam and Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit and the wicked Haman is far-fetched. In fact, the Talmud (*Chullin* 139b) makes precisely this association when it asks rhetorically: "Where is Haman hinted in the Torah?" And it answers that it is derived from this verse that expresses G-d's outrage at Adam and Eve's violation of His command not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge.

This clearly begs for an explanation. How are these two disparate themes—G-d's outrage with eating of the Tree of Knowledge and Haman—related?

The Heavenly Voice

One explanation is that Haman is both an evil historical figure and a heavenly voice that comes to us and demands of us: "What have you done? Why have you gone in the wrong direction? Why have you misused your G-d given talents? Why have you squandered an opportunity to do the right thing?"

When we see the Hamans of the world rear their ugly heads it is obvious that we must do whatever we can to fight that evil.

However, it is also a time for us to look inwards and ask ourselves, what is missing in our lives that we can correct.

In other words, while the historical Hamans were nothing less than vile and evil creatures, their appearance demands of us to look inward and remove the subtle forms of Haman that lurk beneath the surface of our being. This is one of G-d's ways to remind us that we have to change.

The Sophisticated Haman

There is a deeper and more mystical way of understanding the association between Haman and the Tree of Knowledge. The fact that Haman was enamored with the idea of hanging Mordechai on a tree—not just any tree, but a tree that was fifty cubits high—suggests that Haman was into the symbolic nature of the tree.

There are two approaches to evil tyrants and their nefarious ways. There are those who are despicable low-lives, who possess the characteristics of animals. They do not find a need to justify their actions, for their rule is the rule of the jungle. They trample

everything that stands in their way, and a human life has no more value to them than an annoying mosquito.

There is, however, a second type of tyrant, one who seeks justification for his actions. Frequently, these despots will use the most sophisticated philosophical arguments to support their evil actions. They can even be formidable intellectuals.

By discovering Haman's name alluded to in the narrative concerning the Tree of Knowledge, our Sages sought to place Haman in the second category. Haman was a sophisticated spiritualist who built his evil ideology of genocide on the top of a tree. In Kabbalah the number fifty—the height of the tree—is associated with the highest levels of understanding.

In our own age, the accursed Nazis and communists used their philosophy to justify unprecedented and unspeakable cruelty and destruction.

What's Wrong with Knowledge

This sheds light on what was the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. At first glance

one is puzzled why the Tree of Knowledge was considered so evil. What can possibly be wrong with knowledge?

However, it is not the knowledge itself that is evil; it is the attitude of arrogance that people acquire when their advanced knowledge is not prefaced by G-dly foundations that put G-d ahead of their knowledge and desires.

According to the Midrash, had Adam waited a few hours until the onset of the Shabbat, he would have been permitted to partake of the "forbidden" fruit. It was not the fruit that was evil. Nor was it the knowledge one received from the fruit. Rather it was the placement of this acquisition of knowledge ahead of the principles of G-dly authority and commitment to eternal values. Glorifying one's own ideology is the first step down a slippery slope that leads to depravity and destruction.

The Seventh Millennium

The first seven days of creation serve as a model for the seven millennia of our universe's existence. Moreover, there is a principle of Kabbalah that "the end is wedged

in the beginning." In other words, what happened at the beginning of creation is somehow related to that which will happen in the end.

In the beginning the challenge was for Adam not to allow his thirst for knowledge take precedence over his respect for G-d's authority. Unfortunately he failed.

In the end of days—the seventh millennium, when we will finally have dealt evil a fatal blow—we will readily appreciate the preeminent role of G-d over intellect; the challenge that Adam failed will be met.

Before that becomes a universal reality, however, one has to be vigilant about those whose ideology comes ahead of their reverence for G-d. One must be wary of those whose morality is based on human ingenuity or on secular values.

Similarly, one must be careful not to take Torah ideals and use them for one's own selfish goals. While one might reach high—to the top of the fifty-cubit tree—one must never use that lofty view as a way of hanging Mordechai.

Only by fusing knowledge with humility, can we benefit from the acquisition of knowledge that will ultimately lead to the Messianic age when, in Maimonides' words at the end of his Mishneh Torah:

> "[T]here will be no famine or war, no jealousy and rivalry, for good will flow in great abundance and all the delights will be as plentiful as dust. The entire world will be preoccupied with the knowledge of G-d exclusively. Therefore, Israel will be great sages and will know the hidden matters, and will grasp the knowledge of their Creator to the full extent of human capacity, as it is stated: 'the knowledge of G-d shall fill the earth as the sea is covered with water.'"

ESSAY NINETEEN

AYEKAH-WHERE ARE YOU?-THEN AND NOW

A question has the capacity to jolt us out of our reverie.

The first question in the Torah is G-d asking: *Ayekah*-here are you?

This is the question we must always ask ourselves.

ESSAY NINETEEN

AYEKAH-WHERE ARE YOU?-THEN AND NOW

The Rebbe and the Minister

In 1798, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of the Chabad Chassidic movement, was imprisoned on the charge that his teachings undermined the imperial authority of the Czar. For 53 days he was held in the Peter-Paul Fortress in Petersburg.

Among the Rebbe's interrogators was a government minister who possessed broad knowledge of the Bible and of Jewish studies. On one occasion, he asked the Rebbe to explain the verse: "G-d called out to the man and said to him: Where are you?" (Genesis 3:9) Did G-d not know where Adam was?

Rabbi Schneur Zalman presented the classic explanation offered by Rashi (1040-1105): the question "where are you?" was merely a conversation opener on the part of G-d, who did not wish to unnerve Adam by immediately confronting him with his wrongdoing.

"What Rashi says, I already know," said the minister. "I wish to hear how the Rebbe understands the verse."

"Do you believe that the Torah is eternal?" asked the Rebbe; "that its every word applies to every individual, under all conditions, at all times?"

"Yes," replied the minister.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman was extremely gratified to hear this. The Czar's minister had affirmed a principle which lies at the basis of the teachings of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760)—the very teachings and ideology for which he was standing trial!

The Ultimate Question

"'Where are you?'" explained the Rebbe "is G-d's perpetual call to every person. Where are you in the world? What have you accomplished? You have been allotted a certain number of days, hours and minutes in which to fulfill your mission in life. You have lived so many years and so many days—Rabbi Schneur Zalman spelled out the exact age of the minister—where are you? What have you attained?"

"*Ayekah*-Where are you?" is thus the ultimate question we must ask ourselves concerning our very purpose of existence? And this question must be asked by every individual about his/her individual goals and objectives, based on each and every individual's resources and potential allotted to him/her by our Creator.

And each one of us must ask ourselves, what have I done to live up to the expectations G-d has of me in terms of my commitment to the Mitzvot?

The Ultimate Question for Our Generation

But, there is an even more poignant form of this question that must be asked by each and every one of us in our generation.

Each and every generation has its specific role and mission that is unique to that generation. And G-d asks each individual within that generation, "Where are you?" in terms of contributing to the goals and objectives of **your specific** generation.

However, it is not always clear as to what is the goal of a specific generation. When we don't have a prophet or great leader to tell us

what our specific mission is, it suffices for us to do all that is required of us; by compliance with all of the Torah's dictates to the best of our ability.

Our generation, however, is fortunate that it does have the knowledge as to what its particular mission is.

All the events that occurring throughout the world are clear "signs" that we are about to enter into a new world; the Era of Redemption. Indeed, Jewish spiritual leaders of the last half-century of all stripes have pointed to these signs as unmistakable harbingers of this new era.

Indeed, The Lubavitcher Rebbe, has informed us that our generation is the one that will bring to fruition the "dream" and vision of all of our past history—the coming of Moshiach.

In truth, the coming of Moshiach, the Rebbe explained is not a dream but reality. Exile is the dream. Exile is not reality because it obscures the G-dly truth. Moshiach will restore the world to sanity and reality.

Thus, our generation's mission—within the context and framework of Torah and

Mitzvot—is to complete the journey that was begun by our Biblical ancestors.

This we do by preparing ourselves for the onset of a new age, when ultimate goodness, peace and holiness will envelop the world. By opening up our eyes to see the good that already exists in everything, and by ordering our lives to follow this perception, we will realize our generation's unique potential.

By learning more about the future Redemption, Moshiach, the building of the Third Temple and related topics, we not only acquire the knowledge of what is to come, but, in addition, our minds become saturated with a new look at the world that enables us to change our attitudes and mindsets for the good.

Ayekah-Where are you? What have you and I done to make this final thrust towards the Redemption?

How many more acts of goodness and kindness have I done to bring and be prepared for Moshiach?

How much time have I allotted to learn Torah, specifically about the future Redemption?

What efforts have I made in the direction of opening my eyes to see the new reality that is unfolding before us?

What have I done to accept the reality of Moshiach in the air?

What have I done to tell and inspire others as to our generation's role in welcoming Moshiach?

And what have I done to prepare myself, my family and the world around me for the coming of Moshiach and the future Redemption?

Rectifying the Past

There is an even greater parallel that exists between the question asked of Adam and the question that we must ask of ourselves in this transitional generation from *Golus*-exile to *Geulah*-Redemption:

Adam lost sight of the mission he was given—not to partake of the forbidden fruit— and when he failed to consider the question "Where are you?" he affected the lives of all future generations up to the time of the Redemption, at which time his sin will be completely rectified.

Similarly, our response to the question "where are you?" will usher in the Messianic Age, that—according to the teachings of Kabbalah—will have the reverse effect on all generations back to Adam. All generations of the past will be cleansed of the stigma of Adam's sin, and all subsequent sins that brought about the phenomenon of death. And we will then experience eternal life, the way Adam was supposed to live before partaking of the forbidden fruit.

And all of this will come about when the question, "Where are you?" will strike a responsive chord in us.

ESSAY TWENTY

IS IT *"WHERE ARE YOU"???!!!*

OR, IS IT:

"where are you?"

There are two ways of posing a challenge to another.

We can either shout the question angrily or ask it softly and lovingly.

The latter approach is the more successful one.

ESSAY TWENTY

IS IT *"WHERE ARE YOU"???!!!*
OR, IS IT:
"where are you?"

Doesn't G-d know?

When Adam and Eve partake of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge they discover that they are naked and hide when they hear G-d's voice. G-d then calls out to them and says, "*Ayekah*-Where are you?"

The obvious question here is: does G-d need to ask where they are? Is G-d not omniscient and omnipresent?

This question is addressed by Rashi, who states that G-d asked about his whereabouts, "to enter into conversation with him so that he should not be startled to respond where he to punish him suddenly."

There is a famous story (See preceding essay) told of the Alter Rebbe (R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the author of the Tanya and the founder of the Chabad Chassidic movement) when he was incarcerated by the Czarist regime accused of treason. The Deputy

Minister of Culture heard of the rabbi's brilliance displayed during his interrogation sessions and came to "pick his mind."

When the Minister presented the foregoing question to him, the Alter Rebbe replied by citing Rashi's explanation.

The Minister was not satisfied. He told the Alter Rebbe that he was familiar with Rashi's answer but he wanted to hear the Alter Rebbe's original explanation.

An Existential Question

The Alter Rebbe acceded to his request and asked him if he believed in the eternal nature of the Torah, to which he replied in the affirmative.

"If so," the Alter Rebbe continued, "we are to understand G-d's question to Adam as an existential question asked of each and every one of us: where are you; what have you accomplished in your life. You have lived so many years (and the Alter Rebbe actually mentioned the exact age of the Minister), G-d asks you where are you in terms of fulfilling your life's mission."

The Minister of culture was impressed!

The Need for Rashi's Explanation?

One could ask a simple question upon closer examination of this story. The Alter Rebbe obviously knew that the Minister of Culture wanted to hear his original explanation; one that would convey a profound message, not just a social nicety as not startling the accused. Why then did he first cite Rashi's answer? Was it simply borne of his humility? Or perhaps, the Alter Rebbe felt it would be disrespectful to ignore Rashi's explanation, implying somehow that is was inadequate?

There is possibly a third alternative. He wanted to first impress upon him that G-d does not want to overwhelm His creations, even when he is displeased with them. Perhaps it was also a subtle hint to the representative of the Russian government that they should emulate G-d's patience and provide him with the opportunity to defend himself against the trumped up charges of treason.

There might also be a fourth explanation as to why he cited Rashi's explanation before giving his own that helped to put the Alter Rebbe's explanation in proper context.

Two Forms of Ayekah

When confronted with the question by none other than G-d "where are you?" we can be overwhelmed and rendered helpless. A powerful rebuke by G-d can be terrifying, depressing and paralyzing. Rather than spurring the person who receives the message to change course in life it can destroy any prospects of growth.

With his prefacing of Rashi's explanation he was essentially telling the Minister that when G-d comes to us with the powerful question of "where are you?" He says it not in bold capital letters, "**WHERE ARE YOU???!!!.** but rather in a soft and pleading tone: "where are you?" I beg of you, please reflect on who you are and where you are going. Recognize your unique place in the scheme of creation.

G-d wants us to certainly come to grips with our shortcomings in fulfilling our mission, but he doesn't want us to deny our positive accomplishments that may seem trivial in the intense light of Divine scrutiny while the faults are magnified.

The Talmud declares: "G-d does not tyrannize over his creations." He did not create us so that He can punish us. And even when He

does punish us, it is tempered with mercy, and it is done, exclusively, for the ultimate good that will come to us and to others who will learn a lesson from this experience.

G-d's "*Ayekah*" thus conveys a twin message to us just as it did to Adam. First and foremost, the *Ayekah* is a vote of confidence in our essential innocence; that we have the means to defend ourselves. And secondly, it is a challenge to us to recognize that we are on a journey and that we may have strayed. It then induces us to get back on the path that leads to our destination.

The Modern Day Ayekah

We are standing on the road that leads to the final Redemption. From the beginning of time we were placed on this road and told that our goal is to traverse it until it leads to the ultimate destination: the Messianic Age, at which time the world will realize its G-d given purpose. To travel on this road that would lead inexorably to the Redemption was our mission and the very reason we exist. This road, however, had many turns and twists in it. When we become distracted and we veer off course, G-d's calls out to us

"*Ayekah*?" This is a wakeup call in which G-d says to us: "Where are you." Do you not realize that you are on a journey towards a very specific destination? How could you have strayed so far from it?

Moreover, we are not just on the road to the final Redemption, we have, as the Rebbe told us, arrived at the very end of the journey, "the time of your Redemption has arrived," and that "all that is necessary now is for us to seize it and bring it into our homes." And the Rebbe issued the clarion call of *Ayekah* to awaken us to prepare ourselves and the entire world for the Redemption.

One could erroneously interpret that wakeup call as a harsh rebuke intended to deny us the opportunity to continue on our mission or that, G-d forbid, the mission was aborted.

Rashi's explanation of *Ayekah* is there to negate that unsympathetic interpretation of G-d's calling out to us. Rather than a means to startle, frighten and punish us for our lack of direction, G-d wants us to get back on course. This is so because He cares for us. He wants us to realize that going back on course will allow us to experience the ultimate in good, and the very raison d'être for our

existence: the Messianic Age to be ushered in imminently by our righteous Moshiach!

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

CAIN AND ABEL AND BASIC HUMAN NATURE

Jealousy and rivalry are the most primitive forms of evil.

They will be the last to be eliminated.

Our mission, at the end of this phase of history, is to prepare for that age.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

CAIN AND ABEL AND BASIC HUMAN NATURE

Will we Ever Learn?

The first crime ever perpetrated against another human-being was Cain's killing of Abel. The rivalry and jealousy between them led to Abel's death and Cain's ultimate demise as well.

As we survey all of history from that day onward, it seems that nothing has really changed. Envy, rivalry, strife and outright hostility exist in all segments of our population. Internecine wars are not uncommon and it is all too frequent that one brother does not see eye to eye with the other brother.

The troublesome question arises. How could there be any hope for the world, if after so many millennia we have fundamentally remained the same? All the hatred and greed, jealousy and violence of the past still exist today. Will the world ever change?

When we examine Maimonides' description of the Messianic Age, his very last statement—that reflects the Torah's view of the final accomplishments of the Messianic Age—refers to how we will no longer suffer from jealousy and rivalry. The impression we get is that human nature will not fundamentally change until a more advanced stage in the process of the Redemption.

In light of this observation the question that arises is what have we accomplished in the past few thousand years in terms of human relations? Why is it that even in the initial stages of the Messianic Age the Cain and Abel rivalry will not cease?

It seems that the only real changes that we've experienced are technological. How can that be that cause for existence—to make the world into a G-dly and goodly place—has not been advanced significantly in the last few thousand years?

Individual Conflicts and World Wars

To answer this question let us see how the world developed after Cain killed Abel. Cain and his other brother Seth bore children,

from which nations emerged. Ten generations later the world was destroyed by the Flood.

Now, when we inquire why G-d did destroy his world (save for Noah and his family), our Sages comment that society had become corrupt in every area, sexual immorality, idolatry, bloodshed and theft. But, the verdict to destroy the world was sealed due to the latter crime of theft.

Here again we see how the sin of Cain—jealousy—is what led to the world's destruction. Theft is caused primarily by envy of someone else's possession.

Hence the root cause of societal destruction is envy and rivalry. But at the time of Noah and the Flood, the malignancy had metastasized into global strife. Instead of one individual being envious of his neighbor, nations are now fighting wars of conquest to swallow up one another. No longer is it personal pride and avarice that blinds us to the needs and interests of others, but the aggregate power of a ruthless nation seeks to take over the whole world.

Indeed governments and empires needed the cooperation of all their citizenry to conquer others. As a result, the governments tried to

control the behavior of its citizenry so that there were no serious conflicts between one member of society and another. Evil was now a colossus.

Just as individual needs and interests were suppressed for the common good, so too were the individual's vices curbed by authoritarian systems of government. And whatever Cain and Abels there remained, the damage caused by them paled in comparison to the conflicts between empires. Evil became a collective force that overshadowed the individual vices.

Recent Dramatic Changes

What has changed over the ages, and particularly, in the last few decades is the **almost** total absence of empires that seek to control the whole world. The world due to economic and technological factors has become, to a certain extent, one large community, where competing empires for world domination cease to exist.

As a result of this dramatic change that we've witnessed in our own lifetime, the individual

has assumed so much more freedom and power.

The end of world empires has resulted in two things:

First, when a bigger problem is solved we start to focus on the smaller one. Without the worry of empires colliding, we have ample time and energy to focus on the internecine conflicts. The power of the state to control the negative ambition of the individual has diminished so the natural feelings of envy have been exposed as the primary source of evil in society.

Second, we no longer have the power of the empires to suppress our natural instincts and inclinations; hence the increase in the feelings of envy and hostility towards others.

Wedged!

Sefer Yetzirah, a primary work of Kabbalah, states, "The end is wedged in the beginning and the beginning is wedged in the end." The sin of Cain, with which human history began, is finally coming back in full force, because we are in the "end" times; on the heels of the Messianic era of Redemption.

But, since we are in the pre-Messianic Age, we can see the paradoxical energies, of individual evil, and terrorism on the one side, and unprecedented good performed by the largest number of people, on the other side.

Our task now is to take the good that we possess and has become so powerful a force and have it permeate every fiber of our being, so that we lose the "last" major vice in terms of human relations, our envy of others.

The process of refinement that the world has undergone and continues to experience is incremental, just as the decline of civilization occurred in stages.

First, the world had to experience the clash of civilizations culminating with the two world wars of the twentieth century.

After we essentially eliminated the desire for world domination, the focus has to be on getting rid of ethnic and tribal conflicts.

Once that problem is resolved, and peaceful coexistence between people of different races, ethnicities and ideologies, we then will have to tackle the internecine conflicts, followed by removing all feelings of hatred and envy from

the human spirit. This final achievement will once and for all rectify the sin of Cain.

The lesson is that the difficulty we have with getting along with others is perhaps more pronounced today, not because we are backward, but it is because G-d left the most difficult challenge for the end.

But, since we are in the pre-Messianic Age, we can see the paradoxical energies, of individual evil, and terrorism on the one side, and unprecedented good performed by the largest number of people, on the other side.

Our task now is to take the good that we possess and has become so powerful a force and have it permeate every fiber of our being, so that we lose the "last" major vice in terms of human relations, our envy of others.

Everything we do to counter envy and discord between people will certainly hasten the Messianic process.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

CAIN AND ABEL: IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

It is axiomatic in Judaism that humans and animals are world apart.

Animals are part of nature.

Humans are the outsiders who were charged with the responsibility to uplift nature.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

CAIN AND ABEL: IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

Vicarious Assault on G-d

The Biblical account of Cain killing Abel raises an interesting question. The Torah states that Cain brought an offering to G-d from his fruit of the earth, while his brother Abel then brought an offering to G-d from his sheep. G-d accepted Cain's offering, but rejected Abel's. Cain was outraged and he killed his brother Abel.

The question is, how could it be that Cain would kill Abel because G-d accepted Abel's offering and not his own? That would be a reason to be angry with G-d; but why did he kill Abel?

One possible answer to this question is based on Rashi's comment elsewhere that the anti-Semite's hatred of Jews is actually an expression of the anger he feels towards G-d. But since one cannot hurt G-d, the hater directs his attack against G-d's chosen people.

Cain was livid with rage against G-d for not accepting his offering, especially considering the fact that Cain was the one who first had the idea to bring an offering to G-d. What made even angrier was the fact that G-d accepted Abel's offering. It is human nature that when one is criticized, while another person, who is deemed inferior, is praised, it elicits a more strident negative reaction than just being reprimanded.

But there was no way that Cain could vent his anger against G-d, so he chose to do so by attacking a person who was created in G-d's image.

This explains why when reading the Ten Commandments horizontally; the first commandment to believe in G-d is followed by the sixth commandment not to murder. Frequently, murder is a repudiation of the first commandment to affirm one's belief in G-d, for the person who murders is actually expressing his rage to G-d.

Animal Rights Versus Human Rights

Rabbi Joseph Albo (a fifteenth century rabbi and philosopher) in his *Sefer Halkarim*

explains that the ideological difference between Cain and Abel—that can also explain why he killed Abel rather than venting his anger against G-d—concerned the status of animals, vis-à-vis humans.

Cain did not want to bring an animal offering because in his opinion people and animals were equal, and he had no right to take the life of an animal even to serve G-d.

Abel, Rabbi Albo maintains, believed that humans were superior to animals and it was therefore permitted to sacrifice an animal in the process of worshipping G-d.

G-d's acceptance of Abel's offering demonstrated that humans are indeed superior to animals. But Cain took G-d's acceptance of the animal sacrifice not as a sign that humans were superior to animals, but that just as it was acceptable to kill an animal it was also acceptable to kill a human. This, in turn, led to the breakdown of society that followed in Cain's ways and equated people to animals, resulting in a diminished value of human life.

Judaism believes that only the human being is endowed with the requisite intelligence, the ability to choose freely between right and

wrong, and therefore entrusted with the mission to change the world.

The human being is indeed superior to the animal if he or she recognizes his or her mission to contribute to the world and refine it. If we shirk our obligation to fulfill their G-dly mission, then we are inferior to even the most insignificant creature.

This sentiment is expressed in the Talmud that says that the reason man was created last, was to inform him that if he doesn't carry out his mission, he is indeed inferior to all other creatures.

A Gesture or a Full-fledged Action

There is another approach to their ideological differences that degenerated into animosity and ultimately to murder. What follows is based on the thesis of the Hungarian Chassidic work *Arugas Habosem* with some additions.

Cain and Abel had differing views of the value of action in relation to serving G-d. G-d does not need our sacrifices. It is the gesture that counts. If so, Cain surmised, the main point of a sacrifice is to coordinate our

thoughts towards G-d; the actual act of sacrificing is only a symbol, an outward expression of our devotion to G-d. Therefore, only a token was necessary.

Alternatively, according to Cain, the action is only an instrument to help us focus our thoughts, but there was no intrinsic value in the physical action of bringing an offering.

In Cain's view, one may suggest, bringing an elaborate sacrifice is nothing short of blasphemy. It gives the appearance that the one making the offering thinks that G-d enjoys the elaborate gift; and the more elaborate the greater the pleasure G-d receives. This smacked of heresy, applying anthropomorphic qualities to G-d.

It may be further suggested that in Cain's view Abel was deserving of the death penalty, for blasphemy is one of the Seven Noahide commandments (that were originally given to Adam), the violation of which warrants the death penalty.

Abel had a completely different philosophy. Abel believed that G-d wants our actions. Our actions are not just a means they are an end. Action is not just a means to help express our feelings and thoughts. There is

actually intrinsic value in action. And the sacrifice has intrinsic value because it involves making our physical actions and possessions, which are made holy and closer to G-d.

Indeed, the very word for sacrifice in Hebrew is *korban*, which means to get close.

In Cain's view, the *korban*, the agent of getting close, was intended for the person who brought the sacrifice exclusively.

In Abel's world view it was not only for the person but also for the world. (See Essay: "Adam Saw Two, not Three.")

Action will Leads to Knowledge

This "debate" as to which is superior, action or thought, is echoed in the Talmud, where this matter was discussed: "Which is greater study or action?" The conclusion was, "study is greater because it leads to action." In effect, action is the goal whereas study is the means, contrary to Cain's view that thought and meditation is the end and action the means.

In the Messianic Age, Cain's view that action leads to thought will gain some legitimacy. Chassidic thought states that in the Messianic Age, action will be the means to knowledge.

Presently, we can only acquire knowledge through study. In the Messianic Age, one will not have to study to gain knowledge; one will anticipate the knowledge of the Torah through the action of Mitzvot. When one will put on Tefillin they would understand its laws, meaning and even its mystical dimensions.

According to this analysis, Cain's mistake was that he projected the future into the present. He was not alone in this regard. Korach, for example, also saw into the future where the Levite will be higher than the Kohain and they therefore felt confident in his rebellion against Aaron.

That mistake to project the future into the present was only wrong in the early stages of history. Now that we are standing on the threshold of Redemption, it behooves us to start acting as we will in the future; bringing the future into the present.

There is a right time for everything; including the right time to be in another time frame.

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

STRIKING A PERFECT BALANCE

Ideologies generally stake out a position and true followers keep to it faithfully and rigidly.

In Judaism, the goal is to incorporate and balance opposite traits and directions, even while leaning in a certain direction.

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

STRIKING A PERFECT BALANCE

A Tale of Two Cities

Cain and Seth were the two sons of Adam and Eve who actually fathered children. (Abel, of course, was murdered before he had a chance to sire children.) But, that is as far as the comparison between them goes for they represented two diametrically opposite ideals.

Cain was the personification of destruction. Cain kills Abel and was punished by becoming a wanderer, never permitted to settle in one place.

Seth, by contrast, is the one whose progeny settled the land and from whom Noah and all of humankind descended. Indeed, the very name Seth, the Torah states, means foundation, "From him the world was founded."

Despite their dissimilarities, both Cain and Seth had progeny that shared the same name: Chanoch (Enoch). But, ironically, the son of

Cain was named Chanoch in conjunction with a city that his father built with the same name. In other words, Cain, the wanderer, the symbol of instability, links his progeny with a city, the embodiment of stability!

Conversely, Seth—who personifies stability and continuity—has a descendant named Chanoch who, the Torah says, was taken away by G-d prematurely.

What message lies in these two paradoxes? Cain, the ultimate nomad, connects his son with a symbol of stability, while Seth, the father of humanity, has a descendant named Chanoch, whose life is cut short.

Furthermore, the fact that the Torah tells us of these individuals and their lives, dictates that there is an important lesson for us in our lives as Jews.

Antediluvian and Postdiluvian

History can be divided into two periods. Pre-flood (Antediluvian) and post flood (postdiluvian). The former was anarchic and chaotic; the latter introduced a period of stability and relative tranquility.

But true stability and tranquility did not take hold until the time that the Torah was given to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai at which time the world acquired its raison d'être. From Sinai onward the world has a means to realize the very purpose for which it was created. Sinai thus solidified the world and put creation's goal in focus..

But, even after the Torah was given at Mount Sinai, there are still two directions Jews have taken in their spiritual and physical lives. There were those sages whose attitude was punctuated with a "pre-Sinai" detachment from the goal of making the world a permanent fixture for spirituality. There were some who divorced themselves from activities that made the world a more settled, tranquil and stable place.

Some of the greatest sages' souls were "on fire" and sought to escape the material world. While, these leaders were spiritual giants, their focus was to get their soul's desire's fulfilled; to escape the material world and the limitations it posed for their soul's spiritual advancement.

Other sages, particularly the Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement,

sought to bring holiness into the world, thus engaging the world and working within its parameters.

Two Modes of Study, Prayer and Practice

Translated into Torah study, one can study Torah for purely theoretical purposes, as a means of satisfying the desire of the soul for spiritual nourishment without regard to the effects that Torah should have on the world. Others accentuated the practical and pragmatic lessons of Torah by concentrating on those areas of Torah study that relate to the practical world.

Prayer, likewise, can either be an occasion for the soul to "escape" from the world and its concerns to unite with G-d, or an opportunity for to ask G-d to grant us all of our requests and provide us with our physical needs.

Observance of the Mitzvot similarly can reflect these two directions. For some a Mitzvah is a way of connecting to G-d, while for others the mitzvah is the medium with which one refines and changes the world.

The first seeds of these two approaches were sown by the two sons of Adam, Cain and Seth:

Cain and his temporal existence symbolize the temporal nature of this world and the desire to escape the physical constraints of existence.

Cain was so named because, as Eve said, "I acquired a man with G-d." One way of interpreting this is that she recognized that his soul was only interested in a relationship with G-d. His focus would be a spiritually "selfish" one.

Seth, whose name means foundation, is the down-to-earth approach to life that keeps us focused on building a world that will be solid and endure.

Striking a Balance

Not only are both approaches valid, but that a person who discovers a propensity for one approach must realize that it must be combined with the other approach as well. The theoretical minded student must also devote time to study the more practical aspects of Torah. The pragmatic student,

conversely, must also devote time to study Torah for Torah's sake, even if it does not contribute to any practical result.

This explains why Seth—who symbolizes the state of being grounded—had a son whose premature death reminds of detachment from the world, while Cain — who symbolizes disconnection from the norms of the world — had a son who was associated with the permanent nature of a city. This teaches us that no matter what approach for which one has a propensity, one must incorporate the other.

Messianic Paradox

The ability to strike a balance between these two directions represents the ultimate goal of Judaism which will be fully realized in the Messianic Age, at which time the most lofty and elusive spiritual ideals will be realized within the confines of a solid, grounded, physical existence.

In other words, Moshiach will not necessarily alter the laws of nature, as Maimonides points out in his Mishneh Torah.

But together with the world retaining its natural character, it will house the most transcendent G-dly energies in a way that we will be comfortable with them within the confines of our physical lives.

In the terminology of Kabbalah: The unconventional and transcendent lights of the world of *Tohu*-Chaos will be fully internalized within the vessels of the orderly world of *Tikkun*. The light will not be diminished in order to fit into the vessels, nor will the vessels cease to be vessels.

ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

THE SMALLEST GAP

Torah is a paradox.

It is the height of our intellectual pursuits.

And it is utterly unfathomable!

ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

THE SMALLEST GAP

Where's the Preparation?

The Torah is divided into 53 portions corresponding to the Sabbaths of the year. Although it is read on Shabbos, the entire week leading to a specific Shabbos is under the influence of that Torah portion.

Since Torah portions are read on Shabbos, we have a full week of study and preparation for the parsha that will be read publicly on Shabbos. The Torah portion was therefore divided into seven sections, corresponding to the seven days of the week. And it is customary to study one section each day of the week, so that in the course of the week we study the entire parsha.

There is one notable exception to this week of preparation rule. Of all the 53 Torah portions (some are read combined) only the Torah's concluding one entitled *V'zos Haberacha* ("And this is the blessing..") is not read on a Shabbos but on the festival of *Simchat Torah*, which can occur on either a

Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Friday; never on Shabbos.

As a result of the scheduling of the last portion of the Torah on a weekday rather than a Shabbos, this is the only instance where there is a short gap between one Torah portion (*V'zos Haberacha*) and the next one (*Bereishis*).

The question begs itself: Why was the Jewish calendar set up in such a way that there is never a full week between the completion of one cycle of the Torah reading and the beginning of the next cycle?

Moreover, it would seem that if any parsha deserved a full week of preparation it would be the parsha of *Bereishis*. After all, *Bereishis*, in many ways, is the most important parsha of the Torah, inasmuch as it is the very beginning of the Torah, as its name underscores.

In addition, it discusses G-d creating the universe, one of the most fundamental principles of Judaism. It is also one of the longest portions and covers an expanse of time from creation to the flood a period of over 1,500 years. Certainly a portion so big, quantitatively and qualitatively, covering so

much ground and expanse of time, should have at least as much time to prepare for as all the other Torah portions.

The Endless Cycle

Three answers come to mind.

The first answer is based on how we view the reading and study of the Torah. It is not simply an academic exercise or a ceremonial ritual. Jewish tradition looks at the reading and study of Torah as an endless cycle, reflecting the infinite nature of the Torah, which is divine wisdom; and just as G-d is endless so it His Torah. The *Hakafos* ceremony of *Simchas Torah*, where we dance with the Torah in a circle that has no beginning or end, is an illustration of the endless character of the Torah.

This also explains why, on *Simchas Torah*, we read the first section of *Bereishis* immediately after finishing the reading of the Five Books of Moses.

To further underscore and appreciate this endless process of Torah, we never allow ourselves the luxury of a full week between

the two portions. This underscores the fact that there is really no end to the Torah.

The End is Wedged in the Beginning

Second, by limiting the gap between the two portions, we are compelled to reflect on the organic relationship between the end of the Torah and its beginning, highlighting the Kabbalistic idea found in the most ancient work of Kabbalah, *Sefer Yetzirah*, "the end is wedged in the beginning and the beginning is wedged in the end." There is a certain dynamism and powerful energy that can only be experienced at the beginning and at the end of the Torah; particularly at their point of convergence.

In terms of the Torah, the very last word of the Torah is "Israel," and the very first word is "*Bereishis*-In the Beginning." This suggests that G-d's original thought in creation will be actualized by Israel. The Jewish nation was chosen to implement G-d's plan for the creation.

And just as G-d, the Creator is immortal, so too, are His chosen people Israel an immortal people. If Israel was just one part of creation

it would be subject to the same law of entropy that occasions all of existence. Israel, however, is the force that implements G-d's plan. And just as G-d and His plan are immortal, so too are the Jewish people.

The close proximity of the reading of the end of the Torah to the reading of the beginning drives home the tight relationship the people of Israel have with G-d's plan of Creation.

Humbled

Third, the six days of preparation before the Shabbat Torah reading was designed to make it possible to fully digest the subject matter of the Torah. "Bereft" of these days of preparation, we find ourselves humbled at the very beginning of the Torah cycle. We can't claim to have mastered the entirety of Torah, for we have not even begun to master its beginning. In essence, while we might cover the entire Torah in the course of a year, we actually never really began reading the Torah.

This notion is further hinted in the selection of the letter *beis* to start the Torah. By commencing our Torah study with the

second letter of the Alphabet, we imply, ever so humbly, that we have never even began learning the Torah.

Every volume of the Babylonian Talmud begins with page two. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, the famous Chassidic master, is reputed to have said, that by commencing every volume with page two we are led to realize that even after we complete the entire volume we have not even begun learning it.

In truth, Nachmanides writes that the theme of this parsha is beyond our comprehension. The story of Creation embodies the greatest secrets of Torah. The more we study, the more we realize how little we really understand.

Thus, the parsha of *Bereishis* has fewer days of prefatory study, because no matter how much we learn we can never fathom, or even skim the surface, of the secrets of Creation.

Once we have this lesson of the elusiveness of Torah at the very beginning, we then recognize that, in reality, this is true for all sections of the Torah—even the ones we think we can understand.

Intertwined

In summation: The lack of a seven day period for *Bereishis* underscores:

(a) the endless nature of Torah;

(b) the intertwining of the end and the beginning of the Torah;

(c) that we have not even begun to study the Torah.

These three explanations as to why we have fewer days of preparation for this parsha are actually intertwined. Because the Torah is Divine wisdom and of infinite nature, the end and beginning are connected. Only when we have a finite linear wisdom are the beginnings and ends polarized. In an infinite world, they go hand in hand.

And because the Torah is infinite it is utterly unfathomable. This implies that the reason we cannot fully grasp the full meaning of the Torah is not because we are not smart enough; it is because the knowledge is inherently beyond understanding.

The Infinite Revealed

When we begin the study of *Bereishis* we are humbled by the realization that the knowledge of Torah we can achieve is so limited. In the Messianic Age, however, our knowledge will be elevated to another level.

The question can be raised. If the Torah is truly infinite and we are inherently finite beings, how can our limited understanding of Torah change? No matter how much we can stretch a finite mind it can never get any closer to grasping the infinite.

The answer to this dilemma lies in the aforementioned connection between the end of the Torah and its beginning. The last word of the Torah is "Israel," referring to the people of Israel. The first word is *Bereishis*, which refers to the highest divine energies, from which the creative energies of G-d flowed. According to the various classical translations of the Torah, this word alludes to Divine will or Divine Wisdom.

The juxtaposition of *Bereishis* to Israel is to teach us that the souls of the Jewish people are rooted in the most sublime and infinite G-dly energies; in G-d's will and wisdom.

Indeed, in the literature of Kabbalah we are told that the spiritual root of the souls of

Israel is even deeper and higher than the root of the Torah.

In other words, while Torah is infinite because it derives from the infinity of G-d, so are the souls of Israel infinite because they too are rooted in G-d's infinite being.

In the Messianic Age, the soul's essential infinite nature will be fully revealed, so that we will be capable of fathoming and capturing the infinity of Torah.

However, even in the present, as we await the coming of Moshiach, we get a taste of that infinity on *Simchas Torah* and each and every time we commence the reading of *Bereishis*. At these times, our souls light cannot be eclipsed and we get a taste of the way we will appreciate the Torah in the future.

ESSAY TWENTY-FIVE

THE LEATHER JACKET

Clothing serves two functions:

It removes our shame and lends dignity.

Mitzvos are spiritual clothing.

They remove the soul's embarrassment in its state of nakedness.

And they also royal robes that brings us dignity.

ESSAY TWENTY-FIVE

THE LEATHER JACKET

The Role of Garments

After Adam and Eve realized that they had sinned by eating the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, the first bit of knowledge that came to them was the shocking realization that they were naked.

Rashi, the great commentator, explains that this awareness was actually more than just the physical reality that they had no clothing. It was the realization that they were naked of Mitzvos. The single Mitzvah they had before, they had now lost.

The concept of Mitzvah as garment is based on the understanding of Mitzvah as more than just a good deed. A Mitzvah generates G-dly light which envelops a person with G-dly warmth and protection. A Mitzvah is like a royal robe. It clads a person with beauty and dignity. Adam and Eve realized that, in one terrible moment, they had lost the warmth, protection, beauty and dignity that once had been theirs.

Their response to this new-found nakedness was to fashion a fig leaf into a garment. While the fig leaf might have provided some measure of modesty, it could not provide much warmth and protection. And it certainly could not restore the sense of dignity and royalty that a Mitzvah confers.

G-d's response to their nakedness, however, was to fashion garments for them made out of leather.

If their nakedness was not physical but spiritual, what did the fig leaf and then the leather garments accomplish in restoring their lost Mitzvah status?

The Paradoxical Fig

The fig and its tree are touted by our Sages as a positive symbol of the Jewish nation, as well as a symbol of sorrow and grief. The fig tree, in its spiritual dimension, is a double edged sword that can either degrade or elevate a person.

One of the many characteristics of the fig that can work both ways is that the tree does not produce its entire crop at the same time. One goes out to pick figs will discover that

only a few of them are ripe. One must go out repeatedly, throughout the season, to reap all the figs. The ripeness of a single fig was no indication that the time had arrived to pick them all.

This characteristic of "teasing" the owner who thinks his figs are ready to harvest was at the root of Adam's rush to partake of the fruit. On the basis of Midrashic sources, commentators point out that the prohibition against partaking of the forbidden fruit was temporary and only to last a few hours. The overwhelming temptation that gripped Adam in that fateful moment compelled him to eat of the fruit. He simply could not wait for the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge to become fully available to him.

Thus, one of the factors that contributed to his transgression was impulsiveness. This very much resembles the person who cannot wait for more figs to ripen and takes whichever is already ripe.

On the positive side, the Talmud (Eiruvin 54a) asks "why is the Torah likened to a fig tree?" Just like the fig tree, from which one can eat any time one chooses, so too one can

find the good taste of Torah every time one partakes of its fruit-knowledge.

The Correction

Adam's taking of the fig-leaf to cover himself was his way of recognizing the root cause of his transgression. When Adam realized that his impulsive nature, similar to that of the impatient fig tree owner, caused him to succumb to the serpent's enticement, he took the fig's leaf to cover himself as a way of reversing his downfall. He hoped to use the incremental nature of the fig tree's ripening fruit to savor all of the permissible spiritual "treats" and always find meaning in life. There would always be something new for him to partake of.

Instead of allowing one to be so enamored with fleeting pleasures, one can preserve a sense of pleasure by savoring every new day and new experience. There is so much to enjoy in the world that is kosher and proper. The supply is inexhaustible.

This fig-leaf "correction" was enough to lift Adam and Eve out of their rut of misery over having lost their sole Mitzvah/garment. They

now had a positive result from their misadventure which, by virtue of the Torah reporting this fact, provides us with a powerful lesson about how we should view life. Adam and Eve now had not only a physical cover for their physical nakedness, but they also acquired a new spiritual garment: a fresh outlook on life.

The Next Lesson

G-d was not content with their fig-leaf. That was but Step One in human development; to take the root cause of one's errors and turn it into a teachable moment. With this "fig-leaf" approach, Adam and Eve transformed the grief caused by the fig tree into a source of positive energy.

Now humanity was ready for its next lesson.

The fig-leaf, with all due respect to the fig, can only cover nakedness by removing the cause of the sin. The fig-leaf, in and of itself, can hardly lend warmth and protection. It certainly does not lend dignity to the one who is so garbed. So too in the spiritual sense, while the fig-leaf gave Adam and Eve a positive way of viewing the pleasures of life it

failed to inform them of their ultimate purpose. It did not show them that they were not just living creatures but they were also partners in Creation. This enlightenment dawned when G-d provided them with their new leather garments.

The leather garments G-d prepared for Adam and Eve took them up to the next spiritual level. Just as leather warms, protects and enhances the body, so too Adam and Eve were able to reach a higher understanding of their true role. This knowledge enabled them to become masters of their own lives and of the world around them.

The Kabbalah of Leather

To better understand its role we must reflect on the nature of leather. Leather, which derives from the hide of an animal, is only an "accessory" to the animal. It is not a vital organ nor is it the animal's meat or bones.

When leather serves the needs of a human being, an extraordinary transformation takes place. Instead of just being an accessory to an animal, whose own existence is itself only as an accessory to humanity, the leather has

become a garment that warms, protects and enhances a human being. The leather garment, then, enables him or her to serve G-d, which is the human being's ultimate purpose.

This phenomenon captures the very essence of why human beings, and indeed the entire universe, were created. In the words of our Sages the entire world was created for the sake of the human being and the human being was created to serve G-d.

Rabbi Meir's Torah Scroll

We can now understand an enigmatic statement in the Midrash which states that the *Sefer Torah* (Torah scroll) written by the Sage Rabbi Meir spelled the world leather (*or*-עור) differently than in our Torah scrolls. The Hebrew word *Or* can be spelled either with the letter *ayin*, as it is in the narrative of Adam and Eve in all Torah scrolls, or with the letter *aleph*, which alters its meaning from "leather" to "light." Rabbi Meir's Torah spelled *Or* with an *aleph* which suggests that G-d cloaked Adam and Eve with light rather than leather or hide.

What is the meaning of this puzzling statement?

The Rebbe explains this anomaly by means of the aforementioned exposition of G-d providing Adam and Eve with leather garments.

The letter *ayin*, which is numerically valued at 70, is the symbol of division and fragmentation. Hence, we find that when G-d wanted to divide humanity he created 70 distinct nations.

In addition, the number 70 is a multiple of 7 which covers the full spectrum of human emotions. Hence the number 70 underscores the idea of multiplicity and division.

Aleph, in stark contrast, has the numeric value of 1, and is used to represent the number one and also symbolizes unity.

Until Adam and Eve were garbed by G-d with this leather garment, it was a product of many influences. It reflected none of G-d's singularity. It could also have had multifaceted uses; some possibly even contradictory to G-d's Will.

However, once the leather garment was used to garb Adam and Eve and enable them to

fulfill their G-d given purpose of bringing light to the world, the leather, *or*, spelled with the divisive letter *ayin*, was transformed into *or*, with the unifying and luminescent letter *aleph*.

The leather was indeed a leather garment but a transformed one. It was an edifying leather garment that not only covered their nakedness—physical and spiritual—but also warmed, protected and endowed them and, by extension, all humanity with the ability to be kings and masters of their own personalities and of all of creation.

The Hide of the Serpent and Moshiach

Our understanding of this discussion is made even richer when we consider the Midrash which states that the leather G-d used to garb Adam and Eve was made from the hide of the very serpent that enticed them into sinning!

The transformation from the serpent to the leather garments used to clothe Adam and Eve was nothing short of extraordinary. The ultimate force of darkness and division was now transformed into light and unity.

It should, therefore, come as no surprise that the numerical value of the Hebrew word for serpent, *nachash*, is the same as for the word Moshiach: 358!

Usually, when two words share the same numerical value it indicates that the two words or concepts are related. How then could the *nachash*-serpent, the symbol of evil be the equivalent of Moshiach, the ultimate symbol of holiness an perfection?

The answer lies in Moshiach's ultimate goal; to take the darkness and division of our world, symbolized by the serpent, and to transform it into light and unity.

This process does not commence when Moshiach arrives and redeems us from exile. It started long ago, at the very beginning of Creation. When G-d garbed Adam and Eve with the tanned hide of the serpent, it was the first step of humanity's journey to that redemptive transformation. It was G-d's way of sowing the seeds of redemption into humanity at the dawn of history.

For thousands of years humanity has been at work to cultivate the seed and enable this transformation. The giving of the Torah at Sinai was the ultimate tool G-d gave us to

accomplish this goal. Moshiach—and our generation, the one that the Rebbe told us will be the first of Redemption—is the one who will **complete** this task and make the world one of true light and unity.

ESSAY TWENTY-SIX

ACQUISITIONS

G-d does not need our sacrifices. We need them.

To offer a sacrifice and think that G-d owes us the world is a blemished offering.

That was the difference between Cain and Abel.

ESSAY TWENTY-SIX

ACQUISITIONS

Mazal Tov and Oy Vey—It's Twins!

This parsha, the one with which the Torah begins, certainly contains important and fundamental lessons for us. This includes the narrative concerning the first human beings born: Cain and Abel. Cain is the first person to bring an offering to G-d and it is rejected by Him. Abel follows suit, but his offering is accepted.

The question many commentators grappled with is, why? Wouldn't Cain have scored some points by being the first person to think of the idea of bringing an offering to G-d, whereas Abel was merely following his brother's example? Isn't there any merit in being a pioneer? And why did G-d come down so harshly on him, as if he actually committed a crime?

Mediocrity

Rashi's approach is that Cain brought mediocre, or even inferior, quality vegetation. His heart was clearly not in it; whereas Abel brought his choice lambs and demonstrated an eagerness and passion for this offering.

The idea of an offering to G-d that does not involve our entire heart is anathema to Judaism. And while Judaism places the greatest emphasis on action, it does not allow us to be satisfied with just dry and mechanical action.

This is especially true about the first offering. While one can tolerate a compromised effort, one cannot build the foundation of humanity and its relationship with its Creator on platitudes and on half-baked efforts.

Where is there a Hint of Compromise?

One can ask a simple question. Where do we find a hint of the compromised nature of Cain's offering? True, the mere fact that G-d said it was means that G-d had looked into his heart and saw no passion. The question is, how can we tell whether someone's efforts are sincere or perfunctory?

One answer is to look at the results. The end result of Cain's offering was that it led to an exacerbation of his rivalry with his brother to the point that he murdered him! One can often tell that someone's approach to doing good is seriously flawed by seeing what they do in the end.

We can see that a person's charitable offering would be flawed if they resorted to angry violent behavior when it was rejected instead of searching his or her own soul to find what could be wrong.

It's All in the Name

Another approach to the contrast between Cain and Abel's offerings is rooted in the symbolism of their names:

Cain was named by his mother because she said, "I acquired a man with G-d." Cain symbolizes the idea of acquiring things. Cain had an insatiable need to acquire more and more of the world's resources. Despite the fact that he had only three other people around, the Midrash tells us that his quarrel with Abel was territorial. The more we have the more we seem to need to acquire and the

less we want to give away unless there is a quid-pro-quo.

An Educated Consumer

A Cain type individual can be a more sophisticated consumer. One can crave spiritual acquisitions. Indeed, the Talmud tells us that the word for a Torah scholar is *zaken*, which is a contraction of "*zeh shekanah*-the one who has acquired." The word knowledge is absent in the word *zaken* because the assumption is that there is nothing more worthy of acquiring than knowledge; it is the ultimate acquisition. A person who lacks knowledge, the Talmud refers to as the ultimate pauper.

Now, despite the fact that spiritual acquisitions are the most noble of acquisitions, it is still a far cry from the ultimate ideal represented by the name Abel. Abel in Hebrew—Hevel—means vanity. Hevel can also be translated as breath; something that has no substance. Abel, commentators tell us was not interested in acquisitions. To him all of the physical world's resources had no intrinsic value.

Cain to Gain Without Pain

We can now appreciate the difference between Cain's offering and that of Abel. Cain brought an offering in order to acquire something from G-d. Sure, it was a spiritual acquisition, but his goal was to receive a benefit in return. Cain, true to his name and personality, sought to gain something from G-d. His offering was thus not one of giving—which is what an offering should be—it was one of receiving, acquiring—"Cain-ing".

Abel, on the other hand, sought to give. Obviously, G-d does not need his gift, but that is not the point. He could not truly give anything because in his mind he did not acquire or own anything—it was all G-d's. His offering was just a confirmation and affirmation that he and his belongings were actually G-d's.

This attitude, which G-d appreciated, is actually alluded to in the wording employed by the Torah in its description of Abel's offering:

> "Abel also offered from the firstborn of his flocks."

A more literal translation, however, yields the following:

> "And Abel offered he too with the firstborn of his flocks."

In other words, Abel gave himself to G-d. He affirmed that he had no private independent identity that was outside of G-d.

"Hide and Seek"

There is yet a third message contained in the contrast between Cain and Abel's offerings that explains why G-d was receptive to Abel even though Cain was the one who had initiated the idea of bringing an offering to G-d.

If we assume that Abel's offering was made after he learned of G-d's rejection of Cain's offering, this incident provides us with a powerful lesson about how we should react when we witness G-d's rejection of our efforts.

Abel was entitled to say to himself, "If my older brother's offering was not accepted, am I so presumptuous to think that mine would be accepted?" Instead, Abel was not disheartened by G-d's rejection of Cain and

he resisted all arguments that would have dissuaded many others from trying to repeat the same offering for fear of rejection. Others might have opted to remain passive until they got a signal that their efforts were desired.

Indeed, despite the fact that Cain was the first one to bring an offering, Abel was the first one to bring an offering when all indications were that G-d was not so excited about the idea of receiving an offering. Abel was the pioneer in not accepting G-d's rejection of an offering even when it comes from G-d.

The Jews admirably emulated Abel's example when they protested after G-d prevented them from bringing the Paschal offering in the desert because they were ritually impure. They cried: "Why should we be diminished?" And G-d acceded to their demands and gave them another opportunity to bring the paschal offering.

The lesson we can learn from this is that even when it appears that G-d does not want our efforts, we do not give up. We keep on trying to get it right. Indeed, G-d's rejection of our initiatives is His way of testing the

strength of our resolve and desire to get closer to Him.

This approach can be compared to a loving parent who punishes his or her child by distancing the child. Obviously, the parent wants the child to reject that state and do everything to come back into the parent's embrace.

Alternatively, it has been compared to a father who plays hide and seek. When the father finds a good hiding place and the children give up looking for him, it troubles him to no end. The father is hiding so that the children look for him.

This entire story serves as a model for us in the days of exile. G-d hides His face so that we continue searching for Him. We must follow the pioneering lead of Abel and the example of the Jews of the desert generation and demand that G-d show His face to us by Moshiach and the final Redemption.

ESSAY TWENTY SEVEN

THE LETTER OF TRUTH AND PEACE

Truth and Peace are the two Most Elusive Traits.

Yet, it is precisely these two traits that will be validated in the imminent period of Redemption.

ESSAY TWENTY SEVEN

THE LETTER OF TRUTH AND PEACE

The Mark of Cain

The parsha of Bereishis discusses humanity's first murder and the punishment meted out to the murderer. After Cain kills his brother Abel, G-d curses him and Cain responds with the plea:

"Is my sin too great to bear? You have banished me this day from the face of the earth – can I be hidden from Your presence?" I must become a vagrant and a wanderer on earth; whoever meets me will kill me!"

G-d responded to Cain:

"Therefore, whoever slays Cain, before seven generations have passed he will be punished."

The Torah continues:

And G-d placed a mark upon Cain, so that none that meet him might kill him.

A Letter of G-d's Name

What was the mark that G-d placed on Cain that protected him from predators and potential killers?

Rashi answers it was "a letter of G-d's name" that he placed on his forehead.

Rashi does not say which of the three/four letters that make up G-ds name did He place on Cain's forehead. It could be a *yud*, a *hei* (the first *hei* or the second *hei* of G-d's name, representing two levels of G-dly light) or a *vav*.

The Midrash does, however, state which letter it was; it was the letter *vav*.

The Letter *Vav*

What is the significance of this letter?

The letter's shape is a vertical line. It is therefore referred to in the Zohar as the letter of *Emes*-truth. The definition of truth is that it remains the same from the top down to the bottom. The very word *Emes* , the Jerusalem Talmud states comprises the first, middle and last letters of the Hebrew Alphabet. This exemplifies truths consistency.

Some commentators point to the letter *vav*'s use as a conjunctive letter which means "add.; It joins two words or phrases. Hence, the *vav* is also indicative of the trait of peace.

Now, our Sages tell us: "G-d's seal is truth," for He is the only true Being, and "G-d's name is Shalom-peace," for He is the ultimate source of peace. Thus, by placing this mark on Cain's forehead, which represents both G-dly attributes of truth and peace, Cain had the seal and name of G-d on him. With such Divine protection no creature could kill him.

The Image of G-d

Had Cain not sinned, then the human face itself would have deflected any attackers because of the "image of G-d" imprinted on the face of every human being. This "image of G-d" explains what G-d meant when He told Adam that humans would "rule over the animals." When an animal sees the image of G-d on a person's face, it is naturally repelled.

This is how our Sages explain the incident with Daniel in the lions' den. Despite their hunger they did not approach him, not

because of a miracle, but because of his G-dly appearance.

But when Cain murdered his brother that G-dly image departed from him and G-d had to give him a sign, which was G-d's own seal, the seal of truth.

G-d's Argument with the Angels

We can further clarify G-d's use of the letter *vav* to protect Cain by referring to a famous Midrashic account of G-d consulting with the angels concerning the creation of humanity. The angels were split: "Truth said, do not create because he is full of lies." Likewise peace said "do not create him because he is full of discord." Only the attributes of kindness and charity felt that man is redeemable because of his acts of kindness and charity.

It appears from this Midrash that truth and peace are the most elusive of human traits and that according to the angels that represented these two traits, man's kindness and charity cannot justify his dishonest, inconsistent and divisive nature.

G-d obviously overruled the angels and did create Adam.

Arguments Reinforced and Refuted

But when Cain committed the first murder it reinforced the argument of the angels (i.e. forces of truth and peace) who said not to create man. It was now clear that man cannot be trusted. No sooner do two brothers arrive on the scene do they violate the trust and peace.

Thus, when G-d seeks to overrule the angels of truth and peace, He imprinted the letter *vav* on Cain's forehead, to demonstrate that, with all his flaws, man will eventually arrive at truth and peace.

One of the handicaps that angels have is that they cannot comprehend the idea of a process. They were created in a mold that cannot accept anything that does not fit into it. Angels, although totally spiritual, are part of nature and they cannot comprehend the ability we humans possess to override nature. Sometimes we overrule nature by doing things that are foolish and sometimes we transcend nature by transforming ourselves,

even from one extreme to another. Angels cannot understand the fluidity of the human condition, nor could they fathom how man is redeemable.

Hooked on Truth

Having explained the significance of the *vav* imprinted on Cain's forehead, as a sign that G-d had attached His seal of truth and name of peace, there is an important caveat.

The letter *vav* also has meaning; it means a hook. A hook is used to hang objects on a wall. When a person wants to attach something to a wall he can do it in two ways. He can nail or plaster it on the wall so that the object becomes an integral part of the wall. Alternatively, one can place the object on a hook, whereby the object and the wall remain two distinct entities that can be easily separated.

Perhaps, this is what the Midrash means that it was a *vav* that G-d placed on Cain, indicating that his seal of G-dly truth and the Divine name of peace that he carried were not attached to him; it was only hooked on him. He did not become an ambassador and

purveyor of truth and peace. Because his repentance was out of fear and not out of conviction and certainly not out of love, G-d's seal of truth and imprimatur of peace did not become an integral part of his personality.

This was emblematic of virtually all the good that humanity achieved before the giving of the Torah at Sinai. All the good done could not penetrate their exterior nor could it effect a real change in the nature of the physical world.

For that to happen, humanity had to wait until the Torah would be given at Mount Sinai.

When G-d uttered the words in the singular form: "I am G-d your G-d..." G-d introduced and inserted His essential name into our consciousness and nature. The name of G-d which represents Divine truth and peace would now become an inseparable part of who we are. Truth and peace were ingested and digested into our systems and can never be separated from us.

To be sure, we still have free choice to overrule our G-dly nature, but to change for the good doesn't require an act of

transformation, we just have to return to our true G-dly selves.

Jacob Appropriates Elijah's *Vav*.

There is another Midrash with respect to the letter *vav.* The name *Eliyahu*-Elijah, the prophet who heralds the coming of Moshiach, is spelled in the Bible without the letter *vav* in five places. The name *Ya'akov*-Jacob, on the other hand, is spelled five times with a superfluous *vav*. Our Sages explain that Jacob "appropriated" the letter *vav* from Elijah as collateral that he will bring the Final Redemption.

What does this "usurpation" of the letter *vav* have to do with Redemption? And why did Jacob feel **he** had to take it from Elijah?

The answer lies in the foregoing discussion of the letter *vav* placed on Cain's forehead. G-d wanted to convey the message that notwithstanding humanity's flaws there is hope and confidence that eventually humanity will live in consonance with the Divine seal of truth and peace.

This hope that G-d harbored at the dawn of humanity was given a big boost with the

advent of the Patriarchs, particularly Jacob, who is said to personify the two traits of truth and harmony.

This process received further support with the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. The Torah is called both "the Torah of truth" and the Torah of peace."

This was further reinforced with the arrival of Elijah the prophet who fought against the equivocating behavior and fence-sitters of the Ba'al worshippers.

The prophet Malachi also describes Elijah's mission is to bring fathers and children together; a mission of peace.

But, nothing will be complete, and G-d's creation of humanity will not be vindicated, until the Final Redemption when both truth and peace will reign supreme.

Thus, it was Jacob the paragon of truth and harmony, who wrests the *vav* from Elijah because he senses how his entire being would not be whole until such time of the Redemption.

Torah: Truth and Peace

The lesson for us is that in the present both truth and peace are so elusive. Just look at the people who are running to be the leader of our country and their fanatical supporters. The entire world could use the "Mark of Cain." It is our responsibility to do our part to bring ultimate truth and peace to the world by studying the Torah of Truth and Peace.

However, within Torah there is a part that has a more pronounced connection to truth and peace. The mystical and spiritual teachings of Torah contained in Kabbalah and especially Chassidus are called *Chochmas Ha'Emes*-the Wisdom of Truth. In addition, these teachings are more overtly connected to the ideal of peace inasmuch as they do not contain the argumentation so pervasive in the legal and exoteric teachings of Torah.

By studying these esoteric parts of Torah we get a good dose of the very ideals the world has been waiting for since the day G-d imprinted the *vav* on Cain and Jacob took the letter *vav* from Elijah.